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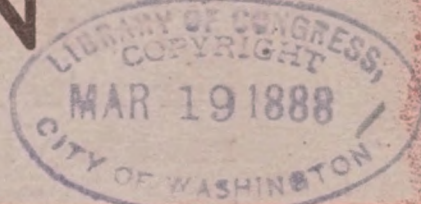


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# A MODERN MAGICIAN

J. FITZGERALD  
BY  
MOLLOY



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## STUDIES IN ENGLISH SPELLING.

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### FIRST LESSON.

A wealthy young man had a yacht,  
Disfigured with many a spacht,  
SAPOLIO he tried,  
Which, as soon as applied,  
Immediately took out the lacht!

### SECOND LESSON.

Our girl o'er the housework would sigh,  
Till SAPOLIO I urged her to trigh,  
Now she changes her tune,  
For she's done work at nune,  
Which accounts for the light in her eigh!

### THIRD LESSON.

There's many a domestic embroglio—  
To describe which would need quite a  
foglio,  
Might oft be prevented  
If the housewife consented  
To clean out the house with SAPOGLIO!

### FOURTH LESSON.

Maria's poor fingers would ache,  
When the housework in hand she would  
tache,  
But her pains were allayed,  
When SAPOLIO'S aid,  
Her labor quite easy did mache!

### FIFTH LESSON.

We have heard of some marvelous soaps  
Whose worth has exceeded our hoaps,  
But it must be confest,  
That SAPOLIO'S the best  
For with grease spots it easily coaps!

### SIXTH LESSON.

The wife of a popular colonel  
Whose troubles with "helps" were etol-  
onel  
Now her leisure enjoys  
For the "new girl" employs  
SAPOLIO in housework diolonel!



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## CHAPTER I.

### THE DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MRS. HENRY NETLEY sat in the drawing-room of her house, situated at Palace Gardens, Kensington, waiting to receive her guests. Her receptions were famous by reason of the magnificence which marked and the distinguished persons that attended them, for Mrs. Netley was a woman of wealth, aspiring to fashion.

With the mystery obscuring her early career, no man, and stranger yet, no woman was acquainted. It was merely known the late Mr. Netley, having amassed a fortune in trade, set an example to all husbands by taking himself to another sphere, leaving his wife the uncontrolled enjoyment of his wealth. Mrs. Netley resolved to profit by his consideration and generosity. A woman of perception, she was aware money purchased most things worth possessing; a person of taste, she resolved on entering society. The difficulties besetting her path in this direction at first were many; but her courage was firm and her will determined. Fortunately, nature had in a measure equipped her for the fight. Her education had not been wholly neglected in the past, nor had she failed to read fiction dealing with motley groups whirling in the artificially-lit circle known as society; through which pursuit her mind had



in a measure become attuned to its ways. Moreover, being quick to observe, she was apt to learn, and possessing tact, was capable of rising to the altitude of her surroundings should they bear her higher and higher in the social scale.

Happily, she was free from encumbrances with the exception of her husband's niece, who, having from her earliest years been educated at a fashionable school, was now a considerable help rather than a social hindrance.

Having taken a house at Palace Gardens, furnished it regardless of expense, stocked its cellars with excellent wines, and secured the services of a chef, to whom she allowed a salary exceeding the income of many a German prince, she knew herself to hold trump cards, able, if played judiciously, to win the game for which she ventured. Mrs. Henry Netley waited in readiness for many weeks to receive society; but beyond the calls after business hours of her banker and his robust lady clad in rustling silks, her solicitor, his frigid sister, and a saintly young curate with white hands and large feet, visitors she had none. The current had not yet set which was to bear her onwards towards the coveted haven of fashion.

It happened about this time a great wail of human misery rose in the east end of London, and travelling westwards, struck upon the ears of certain matrons, who possessing the precious gifts of wisdom and charity, immediately resolved to organize a bazaar, that they might have an opportunity of publicly exhibiting their marriageable daughters and of relieving the starving poor. Having the cause of mercy deeply at heart, it was resolved this fancy fair should be established regardless of expense; the scene must resemble Vauxhall Gardens in their palmy days; the ministering angels to whose care stalls were allotted should dress



in the becoming costumes of the last century. To relieve bitter hunger in such a charming manner is an achievement worthy of modern civilization.

Now amongst those solicited by a committee of ladies to contribute towards the bazaar was Mrs. Henry Netley. Her donation equalled her good-nature. The committee, having just called on the Duchess of Bloomsbury, and received her grace's contribution of half-a-crown from the hands of her butler, were in a frame of mind to appreciate Mrs. Netley's generosity. They immediately asked her to become one of the committee. The offer was accepted with gratitude, and her name subsequently figured in society papers in such company as made the good woman's heart beat in her ample breast with pride and rejoicement.

From this time forward, Mrs. Henry Netley saw many visitors, and frequently visited in return. She established a weekly reception-day, gave excellent dinners, patronized art, and was seen in the stalls on first nights at west-end theatres.

To be sure Mrs. Netley's female friends, with that sweet compassion which fills women's breast towards those of their sex whose wealth, position, or gifts exceed their own, pitied her exceedingly. The spinster whose sister had married a baronet's cousin; the military widow, whose husband would have been a general had he lived; the bishop's daughter from over the way, congratulated themselves on their Christian humility in recognizing her in public. True, these worthy women invariably craned their necks and assumed their sweetest smiles, in expectation of a nod, at the approach of Lady Messalina, whom they knew to be one of the vilest of her sex. But then her ladyship, suiting herself to the times, lives on excellent terms with her husband, whose bills she pays, drives in the family coach regularly to church on Sundays when



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in the country, and invariably has a bishop at her delightful dinners in town during the season. Poor Mrs. Netley was virtuous, generous, charitable, but plebeian, and money alone gained her tolerance in that section of society known as polite. What did it matter to her if behind her back aristocratic friends sneered at her as a tradesman's widow, ridiculed her manner, criticized her grammar, when to her face they greeted her with graciousness, enjoyed her hospitalities, and bowed before her as the possessor of solid wealth? What god ever numbered half so many worshippers as Mammon?

Triumphant to a certain extent, Mrs. Henry Netley was desirous of carrying her success further afield. It therefore came to pass that for a certain consideration—equalling in amount a month's salary at a play-house or a year's royalty on the sale of her photographs—a fashionable beauty had appeared for a quarter-of-an-hour at one of her receptions. With this investment of her money Mrs. Henry Netley was perfectly satisfied; gossiping papers announced the memorable fact in course of the week; those who wished to gain Mrs. Netley's good graces spoke of the fashionable beauty as her friend. A month later, Mrs. Netley's portrait, so flattered and idealized as to bear but slight resemblance to the original, was presented as a weekly supplement to a society journal as one of the leaders of fashion; for which advertisement she had previously agreed with the enterprising editor to purchase five hundred copies at retail price.

People now inquired who Mrs. Henry Netley was, and a certain set of men, frequenters of club smoking-rooms and west-end salons, the sharp-beaked, keen-scented birds of prey of the human species, replied indirectly she was a woman who gave capital dinners and kept a deuced good cellar.



To many these commendations were sufficient testimony to her social standing and good taste. In due course it happened one of her male acquaintance was anxious to meet his friend's wife at Mrs. Netley's board, and as the lady mentioned was a woman of title, and gracious enough to waive the usual conventional forms of introduction and visiting, Mrs. Netley speedily found herself entertaining a real countess. The mere enterainment was no difficult task, for her ladyship, not having seen her husband's friend for several hours, had naturally much to say to him during and after dinner, so that the presence of the hostess was almost ignored. In return, the real countess had invited Mrs. Netley to a crush, and here she had encountered Lord Pompey Rokeway, a gay though ancient personage, who henceforth became the central figure of her day dreams.

Lord Pompey was a tall wooden-figured man, erected on large flat feet, with limbs loosely riveted to his lean body. The auburn locks covering his small head were surprisingly brilliant of hue; his even rows of white teeth looked a trifle too modern for their setting, whilst a certain even balance of his upright body suggested the sustaining powers of a corset. About his whole appearance hovered a decided air of formality that had outlived its day. Even in a society where the presence of conventionality reduces individuality to the flat level of general mediocrity, Lord Pompey had managed to preserve his originality. His strange habit of giving words to his thoughts, unconscious or heedless of being overheard, the firm belief he held of the irresistible fascinations he exercised, made him the hero of a hundred ridiculous stories.

The younger son of the impoverished Duke of Bloomsbury, Lord Pompey's inheritance had been small whilst his tastes were expensive. He had therefore from an early period of life been accustomed to



exist on profits arising from the prestige of his name. Before reaching the age of thirty he had married a comedy actress, whose salary from the theatre he spent, and whose presents from her admirers he appropriated; this being the tax he levied for the advertisement his name afforded her. Save where money was concerned, his conduct towards her was generous in the extreme. He seldom interfered with the liberty so dear to artistes, and was never so ungracious as to grudge the happiness her companionship afforded to wealthy humanity. Moreover, his manner towards her was characterized by an air of gallantry more befitting a suitor than habitual to a spouse. In many respects he was regarded by his wife and her ever-changing circle of male friends as a model husband; and she and he might have lived a shining example of connubial felicity, and died in the odour of domestic sanctity, had not the lady become convinced the advertisement of her alliance was too dearly paid for by loss of her earnings, and, anxious for a new sensation, eloped with her footman.

By this event Lord Pompey lost a golden harvest and a gifted wife, whose charms were freely canvassed and universally admitted by mankind. He felt her loss severely; indeed so keen was his love and so great his charity, he would have overlooked her indiscretion and received her again, had not his father, for whom he entertained great fear and deep reverence, commanded him to sue for a divorce.

Deprived of his income, Lord Pompey was obliged to supply its absence, and therefore, in return for certain sums, gave bubble companies the privilege of using his name in advertising frauds. He moreover permitted its appearance on the title-pages of a couple of novels, written by an impecunious hack for an enterprising publisher. Likewise he gave testimony in the



form of letters which were publicly printed to the inestimable benefit arising from use of Dragonfly powders, Chinese shaving paste, and Dutch butterine. The pleasure of his company at dinner was secured by ambitious city men on condition of their purchasing particular wines he ventured to recommend and helped to drink, or their ordering from certain merchants coals for whose superiority he could vouch. Nor did his services to humanity end here. His experiences were placed at the disposal of young men about entering life; and his exertions towards opening the doors of society to those anxious of passing within their portals, could be secured at so much a head.

In a little while Mrs. Henry Netley and Lord Pompey Rokeway were excellent friends; and he soon becoming aware of her ambition, undertook to gratify it in all. Lord Pompey was familiar with royalty, and had more than once proved himself useful to one described as an illustrious person. Some months from the date of his first encounter with Mrs. Netley, his lordship hinted he would induce royalty to become her guest. The thought of this honour almost overwhelmed a soul never darkened by the shadow of socialism. In fulfilling his promise, Lord Pompey killed two birds with one stone; for it happened at this time the illustrious personage was anxious to entertain a select circle of friends, whom for certain reasons, he found it impossible to receive in his own home. In this difficulty Lord Pompey found his opportunity. Mrs. Netley's name was mentioned to the illustrious personage, her *ménage* extolled, her complaisancy guaranteed. After some consideration, it was arranged the illustrious personage was to invite his select friends to a dinner at Mrs. Netley's house, which she was not only graciously permitted to provide, but likewise allowed to attend.



Totally ignorant of the names of her guests, she magnified their rank, and in her fervid imagination considered their condescension must even equal their virtue. She pictured herself being taken to dinner by a star and a garter, and beheld herself subsequently sipping coffee with jewelled duchesses and other lovely ladies of high degree. Alas that imagination should exceed reality. Neither a star nor a garter sat down at her table. A tall young gentleman, with light hair, weak legs, and a remarkable leer, took her down to dinner; the jewelled duchesses and other lovely ladies of high degree, whose names she had somehow entirely failed to catch, made her frigid bows, and, subsequently ignoring her presence, devoted themselves with great attention to her excellent champagne and the conversation of their male companions.

She found some compensation, poor soul, for her vast disappointment in the fact that the illustrious personage had warmly shaken hands with her on his arrival, and made her a gracious little speech whilst he mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. But this honour was not repeated, as he had left the house before she was aware of his departure, and had to accept the apologies and explanations of his having to attend a debate of national importance made on his behalf by Lord Pompey. Most of the guests, it appeared, had likewise not stood upon the order of their going, but had gone at the same time as the illustrious personage, they no doubt also taking keen interest in debates of national importance; so that Mrs. Netley was soon left alone to meditate upon the brevity of human grandeur. However, her reward came in due course; for before the season ended she was bidden to a great garden-party at the illustrious personage's country house, where she had the honour



of having her feet trodden upon, her portly person crushed, and a Parisian costume, ordered for the occasion, hopelessly ruined by the highest nobility in the land.

The month was May, the hour was nine, and Mrs. Henry Netley waited to receive the aristocracy of rank and talent she had bidden to her home—a combination blending dignity and freedom, elegance and picturesqueness. With some sense of pride and pardonable triumph, she surveyed her surroundings, which manifested a wealth that was enormous and a taste not wholly due to the decorator. At the head of the great staircase fountains splashed and sparkled; orange and lemon trees half screened the lower limbs of statuary; within the spacious rooms, opening one from another, chandeliers of wrought silver and Venetian glass depended from carved and vaulted ceilings; curtains of Persian fabric were drawn from the wide portals; frescoes lined the walls; the *ensemble* presented a dazzling scene of light and colour.

From the contemplation of such splendour, she turned with increased satisfaction to survey her reflection in a neighbouring mirror. There she stood, a woman of short stature, with a well-developed chest, round highly-coloured face, ample chin, short nose, and pleasant blue eyes. But this reflection, viewed with those eyes, assumed virtues it lacked to less appreciative visions. The good-humoured common-place features assumed a placid dignity, the stunted heavy figure an air of grace and majesty, to their possessor. So is it with us all. In love with ourselves, we idealize our persons, and from the cradle to the grave, see them as they never have been, never are, nor will be, to other eyes.

A slight rustle in the adjoining room fell upon Mrs. Netley's ears; she turned from the mirror with an



air befitting stage royalty, and met her niece. The matron surveyed the girl critically, as if gauging the market value of a picture or the merits of a statue. Apparently satisfied with her scrutiny she smiled approvingly.

"Dear child," she said, "how charming you look to-night, these bright eyes are destined to win a coronet."

"And why a coronet?" asked the younger woman, looking at her aunt with a smile, which might mean amusement or disdain.

"Because it would place you in the position to which your beauty entitles you, and give you all things desirable."

"I fear you don't believe in true hearts being more than coronets."

"Dear Miriam, that's but a foolish, romantic notion. Poets and writers are strange people, and never mean what they say."

The girl coloured, and then, as if glad to turn the conversation into another channel, said:

"If they are strange people, why ask them to your house?"

"Because they are fashionable just now. We must have them at our gatherings as we must have Indian jars in our rooms, whether we like them or not. Æstheticism has gone out, clever people have come in. One meets them everywhere in society."

"So much the better for society," said Miriam, slightly tossing her head backwards.

"Besides," continued Mrs. Netley with a complacent smile, "they are useful in their way. Through them one learns what pictures are worth seeing, what novel is worth reading, what song one should admire, the name of the next Lyceum revival, in fact all one should speak of unless one would be considered an ignoramus. Yes, they are decidedly useful!"



"I think," said Miriam, the colour deepening on her face, "if your literary friends heard you, they would not feel flattered."

"You speak in general terms but I know you refer to Philip Amerton," said Mrs. Netley with an air of shrewdness. Receiving no answer she continued, "I fear you think too much of Mr. Amerton. Now one word, child, before our guests arrive; be less friendly towards him and more civil to Colonel Tarbert, and you will please me better."

"I hope I am not uncivil to any of your friends."

"You know what I mean. You are also aware the colonel admires you, and he may be an earl one day."

"The consideration does not influence me," her niece replied.

"You were not insensible to his attentions before meeting Mr. Amerton."

"It's only by comparisons we arrive at conclusions."

"You are incorrigible," said the matron. The roll of carriages and a peal of the door-bell announced the arrival of guests. "I may live," she concluded, "to see you married to a commoner."

"It is quite possible," the girl answered with a smile.

Two hours later Mrs. Netley's rooms were crowded. An English cabinet minister, an Austrian prince, and a Russian ambassador whispered state secrets under a palm; near them a fashionable actress and a colonial bishop discussed vivisection; whilst a gouty admiral and a famous tragedian debated on the condition of the navy. Friends met, foes smiled on each other, introductions were made, an Italian tenor sang. The babble of a hundred voices, the sound of silvery laughter, and the notes of stringed instruments mingled in bewildering confusion. Mrs. Netley's reception was a success; yet a shade of uneasiness rested on her broad features,



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and her eyes were continually turned in the direction of the entrance door. At last a name she had long waited to hear sounded on her ears, and Lord Pompey Rokeway was announced.

"Ah! Lord Pompey," said Mrs. Netley, with a sigh of relief, extending one hand and throwing back her head in an attitude she considered languishing, "so glad to see you."

A withered smile crossed his wrinkled face.

"Gad!" he thought, giving his ideas utterance as was his wont; "always knew she was a woman of taste. Charming woman, too—really is, you know."

Mrs. Netley raised her fan to hide a smile of gratification she was powerless to restrain at words she knew were not meant for her ear.

"I must confess," she said, in a tone of tender confidence, "I missed you."

"So sorry—that is, so glad. Dined with a fellow in Pimlico; recommended him some wine; hope 'twon't poison him."

"You are always so considerate."

"Yes, so I am;" then to himself, "Gad, she's looking charming to-night; know she likes me. Same with all women, they can't help it, not they."

At that instant the bishop's daughter, the spinster whose sister had married a baronet's cousin, and the widow of one whose military career was blighted in its bud by excessive use of brandy, advanced side by side towards his lordship, smiling and simpering like three elderly graces clad in nineteenth-century costumes. Lord Pompey took the hand each extended to him in turn, bowing with a stateliness and grace that filled them with delight.

"So long since we met," said the bishop's daughter, a tall thin lady with a white face and pink eyes, reminding one of a rabbit. "You will remember



perhaps I saw you last at the primate's delightful garden-party."

"Of course," said Lord Pompey, who had not the slightest recollection of the occurrence. Then he added, speaking to himself, "Pretty, but faded!" and gave a little jaunty step as if this old butterfly would wing his flight onwards. But the widow, stout and florid, as becoming one who had escaped martyrdom, laying her finger tips on his arm and giving him an appealing glance, detained him. He had sold her husband some abominable cognac that went far towards shortening his days, and it may be she held Lord Pompey in grateful regard. In response to her simper, half sentimental, half sad, his lordship tittered, and his beautiful eyebrows rapidly ascended his forehead, investing his face with a curiously comic air.

"Dear Lord Pompey," said the widow in a tender whisper, "you never come and see me now."

"Gad, that's true," he replied. For the consumption of wine in her household was not what it had been, and she was no longer worthy of his attention as a customer.

"But to me you are always associated with the happy past," she said. The happy past briefly described a period when the defunct major had sworn at her during dinner and flung tumblers at her head when the guests departed.

"Gad, so I am," Lord Pompey answered, adding *sotto voce*, "Looking better since the major died—poor devil!—daresay she wants to marry again."

"I am always at home on Thursdays; you will come and see me some day?"

"Delighted," replied the old beau, who never intended to accept her invitation.

Then the spinster, an angular lady with a Roman nose, spoke out, "Shall we meet at my sister's cousin,



Lady Frump's ball on Wednesday week?" she asked, looking as if all her chance of future happiness lay in his reply.

"Don't know her," he responded.

"That doesn't matter. I'll have an invitation sent you. She will be so glad to make your acquaintance, Lord Pompey."

"Wonder who this woman is? Deuced bore wants to flirt with me," he said audibly. Then added, "Thank you, I shall be delighted," and left them.

"What charming manners," remarked the bishop's daughter, as her pink eyes followed him admiringly.

"Yes," said the spinster, "such ease of manner, such grace."

"Noblesse oblige," added the widow.

And the drawing-rooms of the fashionable world being to these good women so many temples for the worship of wealth and rank, they three set forward to seek fresh shrines and idols new.

The while a woman young and fair sat alone in a curtained alcove, taking mental notes of the scene before her. Her pale oval face was lighted by dark lustrous eyes, her broad forehead crowned by masses of brown hair.

The great charm of her irregular features lay in their expression of simplicity, thoughtfulness and capability of reflecting various currents of her mind.

An author by profession, she was known to the reading world as Gal Alex, and to her friends as Louise Westerby. The strength of conception, conciseness of expression, and insight to character displayed in her novels, had for years caused her sex to be mistaken by critics of her works. Friendless since the death of her only relative, an aunt who had reared her, she with a courage sufficiently strong to defy the world's regard,



had lived alone. As a bully retreating before defiance, society became mute when faced by her independence, and even in a circle whose members feed hungrily on the characters of their fellows, no breath of calumny had been whispered against her. Brilliant as a conversationalist, sympathetic as a friend, her company was ever eagerly sought and thoroughly enjoyed.

Bending slightly forward, one arm resting on her knee, one hand supporting her head, she gazed before her. And as she sat, Ulic Tarbert, a young man, long-limbed and square-shouldered, with honest blue eyes lighting a frank face, approached and greeted her, the drift of his words seeming more pleasant for the music of his voice.

"I have been looking for you," he said, sitting beside her with the air of a privileged friend; "I didn't know you had arrived."

"I came early, and have sat here watching my fellow-creatures, as the monkeys at the Zoo regard their visitors!"

"How amusing it must be."

"For the monkeys—yes."

He felt as if a discordant note had sounded in his ear, and was silent for some time. Presently he said, by way of beginning a conversation anew:

"What a charming woman is our hostess."

"So all men declare."

"And you will admit they are excellent authorities when the opposite sex is concerned?"

"There you mistake. If you want to find a woman's true character, set another woman to discover it."

"On the principle of sending a thief to catch a thief?"

"Mr. Tarbert!"

"Oh I beg your pardon. I mean your sex are excellent judges of each other, and never err on the



side of leniency. But you agree with me that Mrs. Netley's manners are charming?"

"So are her receptions."

"She has an open heart."

"And keeps an open house."

"I often wonder she can bear that antiquated fop, Lord Pompey."

"Here is a man's judgment on a man. Are you jealous of him?"

"Nonsense; jealous of a man who might be my grandfather."

"It's impolite to speak of age."

"Then Debrett is terribly rude. 'Tis said Lord Pompey wants to marry Mrs. Netley for sake of her wealth, and no man should wed for money."

"Save he that wants it."

"You are not in your usual mood to-night," replied the young man, glancing at her closely, and his voice, full of kindness, almost brought tears to her eyes.

"I am playing at being merry," she answered.

"And you succeed in being ironical."

"Look," she said, shrinking back into the shadow of the alcove, "here comes Benoni, the modern magician."

"So he does," replied Ulic Tarbert, regardless for the moment of his companion's manner in his interest in the mystic's appearance.

"Have you known him long?"

"For some months," she answered in a subdued voice.

"He is reported to be an extraordinary man."

"Yes?" she said interrogatively.

"'Tis said the lives of those he approaches lie open before him, and he reads their minds as the pages of a book."

"That may account for the sadness of his face, which is never gladdened by a smile."



"You take a cynical view of humanity."

"Certainly."

"Why?" he asked, looking at her almost reproachfully.

"We all judge from the experiences of our lives."

A look of distress came into his face. Neither spoke; both watched the mystic's movements.

On Benoni's entering the room with noiseless footfall and stately grace, all eyes turned towards the door, all voices were suddenly hushed. His appearance was no less notable than majestic. His delicately carved features, rich dusky complexion, and eyes dark as night and luminous as stars, presented a type of Oriental beauty rarely excelled. His blue-black hair, parted in the centre, hung upon his shoulders. His tall, lithe figure was clad in purple velvet reaching to his feet; and on his breast burned a precious stone of unusual size and exceeding brilliancy. Profound thought and repressed feelings gave an expression of spirituality and pathos to a face of singularly noble lineaments; whilst his air and movements denoted a stately gravity and suppressed power remarkably impressive.

As he advanced through the room laughter died, gossip sank to silence, and crowds parted to make clear his path. Some there were to whom he spoke, and his voice fell with delight upon their ears, as the music of waves upon a shore. Slow and sure as the steps of Fate he approached the alcove where Gal Alex and her companion sat; and as he drew near them, she almost involuntarily placed one hand on Ulic Tarbert's arm as if mutely claiming his protection. If Benoni noted her action, he gave no sign of his perception, but bowing low before her, crossed his arms upon his breast by way of salutation.

"You avoid the crush," he said in dulcet tones.

"Yes; I feel rather tired, and from this nook one



can watch the performers without appearing in the play."

"You have no sympathies with the players?" he asked.

"Few, I fear. You know I am a worker."

"Yours is the happier lot."

"I'm not quite sure of that. I sometimes wonder whether the bee or the butterfly is happier; but I suppose one is never satisfied with one's condition."

"Surely," said Ulic Tarbert, "having youth and fame nothing remains for you to desire."

"Nothing left to desire," she repeated in a dreamy manner, for the moment heedless of those around her, "because I have youth, a season of error, and fame, a bubble on life's stream." Then rousing herself with an effort she added with nervous counterfeit merriment, as if anxious to obliterate the effect of her last words, "Yes, there is one thing more I desire, and *you*," she continued, turning to Benoni, "*you* can grant it me, unless what I heard be false. Will you give me what I ask?"

"If I can," he answered gravely, fixing his dark eyes upon her face.

"Thank you. I want a flower: you see I am without one. Cause a rose or a tulip to fall from the ceiling or spring from the ground," she said, laughing as if her heart was light.

"Your desire is granted," he answered, and stooping down he raised a tulip which lay at her feet and handed it to her. The dew was wet upon its petals, and looking within its cup she saw a folded slip of paper concealed. The light died suddenly from her face, as sunlight intercepted by cloud fades from a landscape. She looked up to express her wonder and saw Benoni mingling with the crowd at some distance. Crushing the flower in her hand she put it carefully away.



Meanwhile pleasure waxed to its zenith in Mrs. Netley's rooms. The number of guests increased, the murmur of voices rose higher, the heat became great. In the centre of the large drawing-room Philip Amerton stood, heedless of those about him, replying to their words mechanically, glancing continually around in search of a familiar figure.

"What a shame," said a stout matron, warm and red from fatigue of fighting her passage through the crowd, "every one talks while such divine music is being played."

"Do you think so?" he answered. "I always fancy music heard at gatherings but a harmonious background to general conversation." And he moved slowly forward, a pilgrim in search of his divinity.

Coming to the end of a suite of rooms, he entered a small vestibule, now empty, and sat down to rest. His position afforded a view of an adjoining apartment, from the open window of which a flight of steps led to the garden. He had not rested many seconds when he saw a man and a woman enter this room by the window. The former was square built, thick limbed, round girted, medium sized, with grey protruding eyes, bronzed complexion, hair thin almost to baldness on the top of his head, and a red-brown, wiry moustache covering full lips. This was Colonel Tarbert; his companion was Miriam Netley. Some unusual restraint in their manner caused Amerton to observe them closely. Blushes covering her cheeks spoke of confusion; a look in his eyes indicated anger or disappointment. Without speaking, they shook hands and parted; he going forward to the large salon, she remaining by the open window. An idea flashed through Amerton's mind which moved him like a shock. Colonel Tarbert had asked her to become his wife. He would have risen and joined her immedi-



ately, had he not feared his presence would be intrusive at this moment. As he hesitated, a voice he recognized as Mrs. Netley's fell upon his ears.

"Has he proposed?" she asked hurriedly, tremulously.

"He has."

"And you accepted?"

"I refused."

Philip Amerton gave a sigh of relief.

Mrs. Netley uttered an exclamation that almost ended in a scream.

"Foolish girl," she said in a voice choked by passion.

Amerton rose, undecided as to the manner in which he might most delicately make known his presence. Before he could move, the angry rustle of Mrs. Netley's garments assured him of her departure. He left the house. The night was bright, the sky clear, and as he looked upward at the throbbing stars, a sense of pleasure filled his heart.

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## CHAPTER II.

### PHILIP AMERTON'S RESOLUTION.

DAY was done, and Philip Amerton sat alone in his chambers, situated in the unfashionable district of Bloomsbury. In stature he exceeded middle height; in appearance, he was lithe-limbed and dark-complexioned. His face, more picturesque than handsome, expressed keen perceptions, deep sympathies and fine sensibilities. What his life had missed or his soul had lost, no man might say; but ardent longing and infinite regret found speech impossible to misinterpret in



the earnest seeking and changeless sadness of his eyes. His years scarce outnumbered thirty, though in seeming he had travelled more than half the period allotted mankind; for anxious thoughts and strange experiences had lined his forehead with wrinkles and touched his hair with grey. Dreamy of aspect, yet a close observer would note indications of strength and power of struggle in the lines of his face. Circumstances requiring he was capable of self-sacrifice; occasion offering he would rise to heroism.

A boyhood passed as an invalid and a youth bereft of domestic ties, had largely helped in developing the absorption and encouraging the reflection to which he was prone. In younger years his love for reading had found ample opportunities for indulgence in the repose necessary to his condition. Tales dealing with the supernatural and horrible had thrilled his imagination and fascinated his mind. Nor was his choice of literature altered by the passage of time. The morbid fantasies of Edgar Allan Poe, the terrors of Anne Radcliffe, and the ghastliness of Catherine Crowe were exchanged for the mystic lore of German philosophers, the cabalistic teachings of English mediævalists, and the strange tenets of Eastern occultism.

As a result of such studies, he had arrived at certain convictions concerning the supernatural world and the influence of its inhabitants upon the affairs of mortals. Experiences which had been his from youth, helped his judgment and confirmed his belief. Sensitive to an unusual degree, there were times by day and night, in light and darkness, when he became conscious of a presence beside him which he could not behold. A slight touch on the shoulder, a cold breath on his cheek, a whispered word in his ear, assured him he was not alone. Whether the presence his finer senses recognized was the soul of one who had crossed death's portal or the



spirit of a living person attracted to him by laws of affinity, he was unable to decide.

What part his spirit, escaping from his body during sleep, played in the mysterious experiences of his daily life he was powerless to determine. From a strange familiarity with persons and places seen for the first time by his bodily sight, he argued that his soul having travelled into futurity, had already beheld them. To the forward flight of his freed spirit down the roadway of time, he likewise attributed his occasional foreknowledge of events, sometimes trivial in themselves, frequently of importance in their results, but ever interesting as proving the existence of a power he neither voluntarily exercised nor wholly understood.

A thoughtful, self-contained man, he asked himself, was this world but the threshold to another infinitely greater; a vast, immeasurable, inconceivable space, whither all men from the beginning had departed? And if so, was it possible those who had passed death's portals ever, in obedience to the law of attraction governing the universe, returned to those bound to them by spiritual affinity or natural affection? Otherwise, what were these intangible, invisible, sinewless things of air which at certain times and seasons surrounded him? Had they been clothed in flesh, even as he himself—his personality, soul or spirit—was now? Only on taking a human body had he become visible, tangible; would he no longer live when the garment of flesh and sinew was worn to dust? Surely, with the stoppage of heart-beats the wonderful world of man's mind did not cease to exist; and if intelligences existed and surrounded him, was it but his acuter perceptions, finer senses which enabled him, more than other men, to become aware of their presence?

Regarding such questions, he like many earnest men, was searching in darkness, stretching wide his hands to



grasp at facts, and finding but emptiness at every step. Would a ray of light never be thrown on his path? Heretofore, in answer to his inquiries, philosophy had given him empty words; modern thought had proved to its own satisfaction that a soul and its spiritual perceptions were synonymous terms for a stomach and its physical ailments. In the dark and silent night-watches of his heart he had cried aloud for sunrise; and science, pointing towards its dim, yellow-flamed, smoke-blackened, earth-lit oil-lamp, declared day had dawned.

In his pitiful search for light, he had frequented the *séance* rooms of spiritualism, where a confused mingling of truth and fraud were accepted as heavenly revelations or regarded as vulgar entertainments. Nor had theosophy, with its unproven statements and startling assumptions, afforded him explanations he required.

He had therefore placidly accepted his experiences without hope of divining their origin, until during a winter spent in Africa he had, under remarkable circumstances, encountered Benoni. To what country or century the mystic belonged no man dared say.

"I was old," he remarked, to Amerton, "when your country was peopled by barbarians, and yet my years are few."

The masters he served were mystics, whose individual lives extended over ages of time. The children of many nations, known in mediæval ages as magicians, magi, seers, prophets, illuminati, soothsayers, wizards, wise-men, or enchanter, they had in a period of hostile criticism withdrawn themselves from the abodes of man, and congregated in the desolate regions of the Himalayan mountains. Here they pursued mystic lore and penetrated the secrets of nature. Rumour credited them with possessing extraordinary powers, compared with which those exercised by sorcerers during the dark ages were commonplace. Knowledge extending



over many worlds dwelt with them; the elements became obedient to their commands; matter yielded to their desires; space vanished at their decrees. And their bodies, having by long and painful ordeals become subjected to their spirits, travelled untrammelled by bonds whither they desired, so that by volition each could manifest himself and hold converse with those from whom he was parted by distances immeasurable.

To Benoni, their favourite disciple, who had dwelt in their service a period numbering seven times seven years thrice told, a share of their power had been imparted, proofs of which he gave to those seeking them in faith and reverence.

One evening when the African sun, a blaze of crimson fire, sunk beneath the weird heights of Bouzarea, Amer-ton resting beside Benoni on the tall grass and wild violets of a deserted garden overhanging the sea, opened his heart concerning his experiences to the mystic. The Mediterranean, calm as a summer lake, luminous as sapphire, broke with melancholy rhythm on the tawny sands beneath; palms stretched their broad branches above them; the warm balmy odour of Eastern plants clung round them caressingly, as waters lave the limbs of a swimmer.

Benoni listened to him with interest, but without surprise, as if his words merely confirmed a foregone conclusion.

"When first we met," he said in a low voice harmonizing with the splashing sea, "I was conscious you possessed certain unusual gifts; further observation proved my judgment correct. As leaves of the aspen tree or reeds by the river side are stirred by faint breezes powerless to move foliage and plants of grosser growth, so finer organizations respond to mystic influences that leave less sensitive natures untouched."

Amer-ton heard him with fixed attention and pro-



found awe. The love of mysticism that had beset him from boyhood was quickened to life; vague yearnings for hidden knowledge became strong desires.

"You speak," he said, "of unusual gifts, what are they?"

"What need to ask me what you already know," answered Benoni; "you can behold sights to which other eyes are blind; hear words to which other ears are deaf; feel the presence of beings to which other natures are insensible. Fitful gleamings of another world flash upon your senses; spiritual intelligences guide you on your way."

Silence fell upon them; the luminous disk of a crimson moon rose from the purple sea; a few faint stars sprinkled the opal sky; the air became heavy with the odour of marengos.

"You hold within you," continued the mystic, "the germs of a power which, trained and developed, might attain sway of which the world has not dreamt; might fathom secrets bequeathed from prophet to sage, from philosopher to fakir since days when earth was young."

Philip Amerton's heart thrilled with longing. His voice became tremulous from anxiety as he asked, "Shall I indeed learn these mysteries, hold these powers?"

Benoni's dark eyes turned on him sadly, reprovingly.

"Patience, perseverance, fortitude are as necessary to the attainments you desire as the endowments you already possess. Before seed is sown the earth must be prepared. The ground-work of all occult knowledge, intuition, lies in your nature; the method of cultivating it is alone taught by mystic sages. Just as strength of intellect depends on development of the physical brain, so the perfection of intuition is reached by spiritual cultivation. When this subtle perceptiveness—this sixth sense, independent and superior to the



others—gains its highest stage, it becomes, irrespective of teaching or observation, impregnated with mystic knowledge as fruit is ripened with sunlight. But before this stage is gained by the neophyte much must be endured. Sensual love must perish in his heart, greed of wealth must hold no sway in his life, desire of fame must be banished from his dreams. All the world holds dear must be regarded with indifference; trial and suffering must be endured with cheerfulness and fortitude. For the body, with its endless requirements and continual passions, overpowers the spiritual nature, impedes search for truth, fills man's heart with hopes and fears, allures him with pleasures, racks him with pains. Not till the body is subjugated can his soul acquire perfect knowledge. Without strife there is no victory, without victory no reward. The so-called Dweller of the Threshold guarding the wizards' chamber—a hideous phantom of fourfold power, deadly to those of fearful heart, obedient to those of brave spirit—is but a symbol of the neophyte's passions. Once overcome, entrance is gained to the store-house of mystic lore."

Philip Amerton's ardour shrank before Benoni's teaching. The sympathy and sensibility that had elevated and spiritualized his nature had likewise rendered it keenly sensitive to all the world held fair. The ardent hopes Benoni's first words had wakened were crushed at mention of this difficult ordeal; for of late the love of a woman had risen in his heart and would not be expelled.

"The conditions you mention are severe," he said, almost sadly.

"It is written, narrow is the way," replied the mystic. And both were silent again for some time, whilst the last crimson streaks faded in the west and the moon rose mistress of the skies.



At length Benoni, who had been gazing out to sea, as if peering into the future, said, "You are not now called upon to decide if you will become a neophyte and embrace the mystic life, as all that is spiritual within you desires; or if you will remain as you are, as your heart suggests. The hour of trial has not yet arrived. When it does, you will be required to choose between the hope of joy and the certainty of pain; betwixt illusions that seem realities and realities that appear as dreams. Meanwhile," he added rising, "go your ways: when to-morrow comes I shall be far from here."

"But we shall meet again?" said Philip eagerly.

"Certainly we shall meet, frequently."

"Where?"

"In England. I shall be in your country before many months have passed. May peace rest with you!" he concluded, and bowing he turned and passed noiselessly under the palm-trees.

With the passage of time Benoni arrived in London, and was at his request introduced by Amerton to society. For a while he became a lion without whose presence no fashionable assembly was complete. With unshaken patience and subtle amusement he suffered the vulgar scrutiny and ignorant questionings of well-dressed throngs that besieged him in the spirit of a street mob pressing round a juggler. Many members of this bran-brained crowd resented the fact of his never striving to propagate his theories. Those who believed in the influences of another world upon this, he said, did so through intuitive recognition of truth rather than force of persuasive argument. Those who doubted must remain in darkness, being yet unfit to receive instruction; no proof, however marvellous, would bring conviction. Scepticism could not destroy belief nor ignorance erase knowledge. When a man was prepared to receive light it gleamed upon him; until



then he must dwell in chaos. Some knowledge of his power spreading abroad, resulted in obtaining for him an invitation from the Society for Scientific Cackle to lay bare his philosophy before the patent electric-light intelligences of that learned body; but this Benoni declined, and henceforth was regarded by them as an impostor unworthy of attention.

During the months he remained in town, for what object none might say, he held many conversations with Philip Amerton concerning mystic lore and occult power. But whilst Philip's desires for these acquirements were keen as ever, he shrank from the ordeal to which a neophyte must be subjected. For love had taken possession of his heart and dwelt there sole monarch of its desires.

Miriam Netley had a power to move him such as no other woman had ever exercised.

And as a sea serene in perfect calm is suddenly roused to action by violent winds, so his affections, heretofore resting in unbroken peace, were stirred to their depths by her influence. Then the force of his nature upheaved long-buried treasures of tenderness, golden hopes, wealth of feeling which would have fitly endowed the noblest woman that had ever lived. In what her charm for him consisted, what affinity drew them together, even he was powerless to say; but the subtle attraction which frequently mates those wholly dissimilar in all things, causing the wonder and commiseration of interested friends, was bound to link them for weal or woe in a common bond. For him love had taken up the harp of life, and in heavenly melodies, to which his soul listened breathlessly, sung of wondrous joys and untold blessings yet to come. Existence suddenly bloomed spring-like before him with happiness; every bud put forth its promise of bliss, the faint music of dawn foretold a rapturous day.



Poet, romancer, dreamer, he idealized her with the full force of his imagination. The appearance she presented to him, viewed through the golden haze of his fancy, differed as widely from her in reality as the picture we conceive of ourselves varies from that painted for us by our dearest friends. But without imagination there can be no love. Is not love itself a delusion? Was not the tyrant god represented by wise men as blind, incapable of seeing things as they really were? Tear the bandage of illusion from a lover's eyes and he no longer beholds a divinity with star-like eyes and nectar-breathing lips, who sylph-like treads the air, but a mortal who pencils her pensive eyebrows, practises her sweetest smiles before the glass, and walks on high-heeled shoes. But heaven grant this happy and too brief blindness may remain to every man upon this earth; else, scarce as they are at present, there will be fewer marriages amongst us and greater traffic in the matrimonial market, where barter is conducted on the principles of a cattle fair or stock exchange, to the misery of the bought and the buyer, and the satisfaction of the lawyer who composes the bill of sale, and the profit of the clergyman who ratifies the bargain by his blessing.

Philip Amerton lay back in an easy-chair thinking strange thoughts. A shaded reading-lamp made a circle of orange light upon a desk beside him, leaving the room in shadows, through which faces in the pictures around peered wistfully. On a table, within reach of his hand, were rough bound volumes of Jerome Cardan, Robertus de Fluctibus, and Jacob Boehm's works. On his knees lay a letter he had read again and again. It was in Benoni's writing and ran as follows:

"The hour has now arrived in which you are called



upon to decide if you will embrace the mystic life. The world holds much that promises fair for your future. If it satisfies the highest desires of your soul, rest content with your life. But if there lives within you strong desires for spiritual attainments, unconquerable yearnings for hidden knowledge, come to me and I will set your footsteps on the pathway leading to light inextinguishable. Consider how different in a few years hence will appear all things which now fill your days. Before three decades have passed, the glamour of existence will have fallen from your sight, and you will behold it in naked truth. Then shall love seem as a dream, passion as madness, ambition as vanity, friendship as deception. In that time shall you learn all the world can give is worthless of acceptance. Regard your present as a period of probation, that your future may know wisdom; trample upon your lower self that you may enjoy peace beyond men's knowledge. Open your soul to the Infinite as flowers expand their petals to the sun. In the silence of your heart listen to its promptings; consider fully the capabilities of your spirit, for before truth is revealed to you much must be endured.

“BENONI.”

Beset by conflicting thoughts Philip's mind swayed to and fro in a storm of emotions as branches are tossed in the madness of a gale. But as the moon rising in heaven subdues turbulent tides, so presently there rose before his mental sight the vision of a woman, the light of whose eyes banished cheerlessness from his heart, the music of whose voice filled his soul with melody. Surely life spent with her must pass as an unclouded day of perfect light. Thinking of her with a heart-rapture that rendered existence a delight, he asked himself what powers were worth the bliss of



years spent in her companionship. Could the lone and loveless life of a disciple, though endowed with supernatural gifts, compensate for the loss of one whose memory brought warmth to the blood and blessedness to his heart?

From the height of happiness to which her love would elevate him, he might look down with compassion on the petty world below. Secure in a felicity welded by perfect fusion of hearts and trustfulness of soul, he might defy fate. Surely union with her would break down the barrier of isolation that shut him out from the warmth of humanity. Would he be for ever content to walk in the future as in the past, like a shadow amongst men, with no hopes or feelings in common with them, no desires or affinities binding them in mutual kinsmanship, unsolaced by affections he was bound to abjure, uncheered by tenderness he was pledged to repel? The pitiful weariness of vain longings depressed him; the heart-hunger and soul-craving for perfect sympathy and devoted love—the best birthright of humanity—beset him. No, he would bid farewell to his dreams of hidden power and mystic lore, shelter his life in the warmth of affection, and forswear all cravings for the supernatural for evermore. His mind was now resolved on the course he would take, beyond possibility of change. In the fervid heat of conviction he turned to his desk, and wrote Benoni the following reply:

“I have pondered well on your words, and have decided finally on my future. I am without the spiritual strength to endure privations necessary for an initiate. Life now holds out to me promises of happiness, the sacrifice of which could never be repaid by attainments of wisdom or power. Regard me as one unworthy to become your disciple; but permit me to



follow the beacon-light of peace, held forward to guide one whose existence has long struggled with the darkness of sorrow and misery of unrest. If I disappoint you, let the sadness of my lonely past and the hopes of my future joy plead with you for forgiveness. Adieu!"

He hastily folded the note, and, to ensure the safety of its transmission, posted it himself. Night descended on him with refreshing peace. The end of the struggle had come; determination had been reached. Throughout long hours of sleepfulness he was conscious of profound calm and long-needed mental rest. When he woke, morning was far advanced. On opening his eyes, his sight was directed to a note lying on the carpet near his bed. He did not doubt it was from Benoni; nor aware of his power, did he marvel at its appearance. The words it contained were few:

"I have received your answer, and accept it without disappointment. We may not meet again for many months, as I leave England to-day, and the period of my absence depends on a will other than my own. That we shall meet in the future, I am certain. Meanwhile my services are yours to command. In answer to the summons of your desires, I shall be with you in spirit if not in the flesh.

"May the All Merciful lead you to paths of peace.

"BENONI."

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### CHAPTER III.

#### PLIGHTED TROTH.

THE small hours of the morning succeeding the night of her aunt's reception were spent by Miriam Netley



in wakefulness and reflection. In refusing Colonel Tarbert's proposal of marriage, she had taken a step which would influence her future life. Having no doubt of her wisdom, she had no regrets for her decision. A time had been indeed when she had regarded him with favour and received his broad compliments with pleasure. His vigorous personality and decisive manner had possessed an attraction for her that might have led to deeper feelings had she never met Philip Amerton. From her first encounter with the latter, her mind had changed towards the former, and by degrees Colonel Tarbert's imperfections dawned upon her. He was almost double her age, his fame was not without reproach; he was red-faced, corpulent, and brusque-mannered; his head was almost bald, and his breath habitually smelt of brandy and cigars.

That by the deaths of his father, an octogenarian, and his elder brother an invalid, he might soon succeed to an earldom, by no means influenced her in his favour. This unusual indifference to titles in one of her age and sex could only be accounted for by the fact that having been at school with the daughters of a radical poet, she had imbibed the theories they inherited, and could talk very prettily on the wrongs of the people and the rights of class. Moreover, being romantic and given to read fiction, a man who was by calling an author possessed a charm for her, which only total inexperience of the craft could create. She would perhaps have preferred Philip Amerton to have been an artist; but on consideration the painter heroes of yellow-covered novels—long-haired geniuses, who achieved fame by a single effort, or died neglected to become immortal—were rendered commonplace from multiplicity, and a popular writer was, all things considered, preferable in real life, for a change. Used to the advantages wealth bestowed, she longed to share



the consideration talent conferred, and as the wife of a novelist, beheld herself an object of interest to her friends, of attention in society.

Than the two men who wooed her, none could be more unlike. The fascination each possessed for her lay in the diversity of their characters; but if the attraction was at first equal in strength it was different in kind; the one elevated, the other lowered her better nature. From the hour she first met Amerton, his influence over her had by a subtle power, which exercised neither word or effort, changed the current of her life. What traits in his character appealed to hers she could not define. The sadness underlying his life, unexpressed by him but recognized by her, had inspired her with sympathy and filled her with some vague hope of brightening his future.

She had formed many conjectures concerning the cause of his gravity, woven many romances to account for the sad look resting shadow-like in his eyes. She felt sure he had suffered—aye, grievously suffered. All the heroes of whom she read had been plunged in grief by the treachery and falsity of women. So must it have been with him. Her heart rose in rebellion against the fickle creature, whilst her soul was filled with rage that the unknown had won his love, to leave him for one who was utterly worthless, though doubtless wealthy.

In a moment of enthusiasm, which solidified to resolution, she conceived it her mission to shed light upon his path. Admiration for one capable of the depth and tenderness of feeling, power and brilliancy of realization which his books set forth, exalted him in her mind. But perhaps his greatest attraction lay in the fact that his nature being higher than hers, she recognized there was that within him she, without fully understanding, longed to share. That he loved



her she had little doubt, though no word of his had served to bring conviction of his affection to her mind; but an occasional look in his eyes when he glanced at her, the tone of his voice when he addressed her, gave her assurance which speech and ceremony might have failed to convey. In his presence the possibilities of her higher nature were perceptible, while with Colonel Tarbert beside her she trod a commonplace plane, feeling of the world worldly, confessing herself a child of earth.

Within a week of the night on which he had despatched his letter to Benoni, Philip Amerton had occasion to visit the library of the British Museum. On this May day the sky was clear and blue, the sun bright and warm, and he felt unusually light-spirited and happy. As he entered the vestibule the sight of a familiar figure approaching arrested his attention, and the next moment he was speaking to Miss Netley. A glow of welcome like a ray of summer light had brightened her face at his appearance.

"I didn't expect to have the pleasure of seeing you here," he said.

"I came to sketch some figures on the new vases in the Egyptian room; have you seen them?"

"No," he answered, and then hesitatingly added, "Will you guide me to them?"

"Certainly," she said; and he walked beside her, scarce knowing if he moved on earth or traversed a land of dreams.

The sound of her voice, the sight of her face created his happiness. Surely whilst she was beside him no weary thoughts of unknown things, no wild desires for secret power would haunt the even course of his days. She would chain him firmly to earth, from which he otherwise might soar to perilous heights. Now was the moment to secure this anchor of his life. He



heard her comments on vases and ornaments without quite understanding the drift of her words; and when she would have proceeded down the room, showing him in her character of cicerone fresh wonders of Egyptian art, he begged she would sit down on one of the benches, placed there by considerate trustees for the benefit of weary travellers through this wilderness of treasures. She consented, and then became aware of something unusual in his manner. She wondered if he was about to propose that she should marry him; and if so, hoped he might use choice language, quote a verse or two, and speak of the despair to which her refusal would hurry him.

"On such a day as this we first met," he said.

This was a much better beginning than Colonel Tarbert had made, who approached the delicate topic by saying, "You're deuced good-looking, you know, Miss Netley; 'pon my word you are."

"You remember?" asked Amerton, waiting for a reply other thoughts had intercepted.

"Yes; at a lunch given by somebody at Twickenham."

"Near our host's cottage stands a thicket, into which we strayed and lost ourselves. The atmosphere of violets and pine-wood there comes back to me now, has oftentimes haunted me since, when I thought of you."

This she considered was a wooing worthy of a poet; the verses must soon come now.

"For I have often dreamt of that day, when a new pleasure was born into my life, and all the world seemed glad to my sight. From that hour I loved you."

Was that all, she wondered; his confession seemed short, and in some way incomplete without mention of his heart, his hopes, or his despair.

"Mr. Amerton," she said, then adding in an under-



tone, "Philip," paused and cast her eyes down. This was the manner in which most heroines of whom she read had acted on like occasions.

For a second he hesitated; some tone in her voice made him wonder if he had merely judged her feelings by his own desires; but this momentary doubt vanished as speedily as it had arrived.

"Let me tell you all," he continued resolutely, "for my heart is full to-day and I must speak. My life has been one of peculiar loneliness; but from the hour I saw you a new element came into my being. In the solitary ways of my old existence your image became familiar; you had woven a golden thread into the pattern of my days, and their hue was no longer of unbroken sombreness. I have allowed my hopes to centre round you, my thoughts to picture you as my future wife; tell me they have not been vain."

The colour deepened in her fair face, his words had touched her more than she could express, a sense of triumph elated her, she felt certain she loved him well, and she would tell him so honestly.

"Philip," she said gently, "I love you. I have often hoped and wished for this hour."

Her breath upon his cheek made all his senses tremble; her words acted on his senses like strong wine upon a child.

"Then, he said earnestly, as if in answer to new ideas rising within him, "nothing shall separate us."

Even as he spoke thoughts of Benoni flashed through his mind, and he looked round half expecting to behold the stately presence of the mystic beside him. His companion did not heed his momentary distraction.

"Nothing," she said, "shall ever separate us—not even my aunt." For to Miss Netley's mind her rela-



tive's broad and beaming features at that moment assumed the dignity and terror of fate.

In Amerton's ardour he had lost sight of such a commonplace mortal, and therefore simply said, "I had forgotten her." Then added, "I must call and tell her of my happiness and ask her consent to our union."

"And if," said the girl, remembering the course of true love never did run smooth in novels, and therefore hoping to meet with cruel opposition that would, after many tears and fears, be finally overcome, "and if she should refuse——"

"Which is probable," interrupted Philip, remembering Mrs. Netley's words to her niece on the evening of her reception.

"You will not marry me?"

"Good heavens, how can you think so, Miriam? Did we not say nothing should part us and must we quail and forego our words at the first obstacle which presents itself?"

"No, no; but I fear she has set her heart on wedding me to—to somebody else."

"But she can't dispose of you as if you were a piece of furniture," he replied.

"No; but she is ambitious, unreasonable, obstinate, and may give us trouble."

"Tell me, when shall you be of age?" he asked after a moment's hesitation.

"Next month," she replied.

"Then," he answered triumphantly, "we may fix on your birthday as the date of our marriage; for when you are one-and-twenty you will be independent of Mrs. Netley, and free to follow your own desires. Another month, and you will be my wife."

He looked up and down the long gallery, it was completely empty, and bending forward he kissed her.



When their lips touched he felt as if his heart had suddenly frozen. Both rose and walked side by side through the halls and out of the building. Nor did they speak until sunshine fell upon them.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### COLONEL TARBERT EXPLAINS.

ONE morning towards the end of May, Colonel Tarbert sat at breakfast in his bachelor chambers in Piccadilly. A number of circulars, letters, and bills, mixed with envelopes and wrappers, torn open as if in haste and vexation, lay tossed in confusion before him. His brows were contracted, and the glitter of his heavy-lidded eyes savoured of unpleasant meditations.

"I have been deucedly unlucky," he said, stretching out his legs and arms, and then bringing his right hand down upon the table with a force that made it ring. "That girl has refused me, and she and her money go to that miserable hound whom report says she is to marry."

It had happened to the Hon. Robert Tarbert before now that women whom he would have favoured with his regard preferred other men; a piece of bad taste he had hitherto considered with compassionate surprise. But that Miss Netley should have refused him her hand and fortune, to promise both within a few days to Amerton, was a cause of sore vexation. His displeasure was greater from the knowledge she had not been indifferent to him before her acquaintance with his rival, and from the fact that he had come to regard her person and dowry as his whenever he chose to demand them. He had been prepared to take her as a burden



appended to her fortune, and found he regretted her independent of her wealth. Until now, when she was lost to him, he had not discovered how well he liked her; for of love in its true sense he was wholly incapable. Before her refusal he had not known how much he counted on her money to prop his credit and keep his debts from tumbling upon him with overwhelming confusion. He felt indignant with himself for having lost a stake, though holding good cards in his hand when the game began; and he felt more cynically disposed towards the world at large than usual, more anxious to avenge in some way by word or thought, if not by action, a fate which endowing him with expensive inclinations, left him without means of gratifying them.

The woman, he concluded, referring to Miriam, was certainly a fool, and in marrying Amerton would be mated to her like. They would beget such idiots as already over-ran the world, who, when not dupes of the few clever men surviving, heavily burden the circle in which they move, drivelling in each other's faces, posturing as politicians to the vexation of nations, as philosophers of penny newspapers, as petty sages to suit the foolish times, as pigmy righters of giant wrongs, and otherwise playing ape-like antics to attract the notice of their fellows—yes, this man and woman would fulfil their mission.

Satisfied with this conclusion, he rose from the table and walked up and down the room. "If I hadn't staked my last penny on that unlucky beast, I might tide over my difficulties again," he thought. "I am too old for sheep-minding in Australia or farming in Canada, besides, civilization doesn't exist for me outside London; it's the only place for men of brains. There is but one way out of this difficulty." His face, relaxing its fixed look, brightened as with the light of



determination. Pausing in his walk at a sideboard, he poured out and drank some brandy. The liquor warmed him as with new life.

Stepping on the balcony outside the window he looked down on the fitful, pleasant scene before him. It was almost noon, and the world was bright; the bustle of every-day life was rife in Piccadilly. Omnibuses with heavily freighted loads, a gay four-in-hand crowded with brightly-dressed women, a wagonette thronged with pleasure-seekers *en route* for Richmond, equestrians bound for the park, pedestrians surging to and fro, a company of horse-guards returning to Knightsbridge barracks, all steeped in sunshine and thrown into relief against the Green Park opposite, passed before him. The sight gave him pleasure—wooded him to its midst. His spirits rose, and with them increased his resolution to save himself from difficulties.

Returning to the room, he sat down at his desk and wrote a few hurried lines, then pausing to consider, he promptly tore them up. “‘If it were done, when ’tis done, then ’twere well it were done quickly,’” he said aloud. “Some wise man wrote such words, and I’ll act on them.” Entering his bedroom, he finished his toilet, left the house, and calling a cab was driven to Charing Cross. Alighting in the Strand, he walked towards Temple Bar until reaching a narrow dark street, running down towards the Embankment, from which it was separated by a low wall and high iron railings. About midway down stood a house, sufficiently gloomy and disreputable in appearance to have sheltered a brace of lawyers or have served as the head-quarters of a bubble company. The door stood invitingly open, and Colonel Tarbert entering, ascended a narrow uncarpeted stairway, bearing evidence of the wear and tear of time, the dust and mud of the Strand. The



rooms on the first floor were occupied by the offices of a charitable organization; those on the second by a society journal of limited circulation. Passing these, Colonel Tarbert sought a higher story, and reached a door giving entrance to third-floor apartments. Rapping at this, he was speedily admitted, and without uttering a word of greeting, crossed the room and flung himself into the first comfortable chair which presented itself.

"Colonel Tarbert," said the man who had opened the door.

"I suppose you would say these cursed stairs are the means to a blessed end," he said, surveying Jacob Glender, a man below middle height, broad-shouldered and muscular. His close-shaven sallow-complexioned face was remarkable for its width of forehead and squareness of massive jaw; he possessed imagination to conceive and determination to execute. Nature had given him strong forces with which to shape the good or evil of his life. Judging from the defiant look in his eyes, as if he held the world at bay, together with certain lines round his broad mouth, the viciousness of his mind had overcome whatever virtue it may originally have possessed. In his general bearing an air of surly doggedness surmounted a certain sleekness that had probably been the result of training rather than of natural expression. He was dressed in a suit of well-worn clothes that had begun life with sobriety, and exhibited sporting proclivities towards middle age.

"You are in easy quarters," said Colonel Tarbert familiarly, looking round the room, which exhibited some signs of comfort, probably due to womanly influence. Glender no doubt had added his mite to the ornamentation of the room, judging from the picture of a Derby favourite, a portrait of Fred Archer, cut from the *Sporting and Dramatic News*, and a photo-



graph of a celebrated prize-fighter hanging upon the walls. To him likewise belonged a bundle of whips and sticks standing in a corner; correct cards of by-gone races, time-tables, a collection of pipes, and a black bottle, scattered about the chimney board.

"Easy quarters!" repeated Glender, standing on the hearthstone, his hands buried in his trousers pockets; "success rewards the enterprising."

"You have been enterprising," said the colonel with emphasis.

Jacob Glender winced; the tone more than the words of his visitor grated on his ears. He fixed his eyes on the man before him, anxious to ascertain the object of his call.

"I have," replied Jacob, after a slight pause.

"You speak in the past tense," continued Tarbert, eyeing his host with some curiosity. "May I be permitted to inquire how you employ your talents at present?"

"Did you come here to ask me that question?"

"Partly," answered the colonel, lying back in his chair and crossing his legs, "and partly regarding business I wish you to transact for me."

"Well you know," he replied, catching something of the irony underlying his visitor's words, "it is my privilege to give tips to sporting gentlemen anxious to make fortunes without waste of time or energy."

"Yes, I know that—to my cost."

"No oracle is infallible."

"Nor did any oracle ever make so much by its fallibility."

Glender smiled and bowed as if a compliment had been paid him. "You will do me the justice to remember that, acting on my suggestion, you have made money."

"Once to the thrice I've lost it; but I haven't come



to complain of this; whatever I may think, I know there's no use crying over spilt milk. I shan't trouble you for advice again."

"May I ask why?"

"Because I have lost confidence in your honesty."

Glender started; both looked at each other searchingly, whilst neither spoke for some time.

"You have come to this conclusion because you've lost a few pounds?"

"Not because I have lost some hundreds of pounds, but rather that I have heard some details of your early life."

Glender became rigid as stone for some seconds; then locking the door, he dragged a chair to a small table standing near his visitor, and sat down facing him. "Tell me," he said determinedly, "what you have heard."

"Let me see," said the colonel with great coolness, "where I shall begin. Once upon a time a young clergyman of sporting proclivities, whose name I needn't mention, took to what his prejudiced parishioners called evil ways. A passion for the turf led him to take shares in a racehorse, associate with blacklegs, and make books." He narrowly watched the effect of his words on Glender, who heard him with fixed eyes and clenched teeth.

"A shady transaction at Ascot almost brought the owners of a certain horse into the law courts," continued the colonel; "the matter was smoothed over eventually, a wealthy patron of one of them, who happened to be a peer, interfering on his behalf. Bad led to worse. In addition to other follies, this young man indulged in gambling, which brought him to the brink of ruin. Hoping to retrieve his losses, he placed all the money he could borrow, together with a considerable sum belonging to his parish funds, on a horse



he was sure must win the Derby. The old story was repeated once more; the horse came in third; disgrace faced the parson. You find the tale interesting?"

"Go on."

"He was not yet beaten. He had always been remarkably clever with his pen, and had for the purpose of playing practical jokes, cultivated a talent for imitating the writing of others. By this means the parishioners to whose spiritual wants he ministered on the seventh day were kept in perpetual excitement during the week. Young ladies who had just left the school-room received amorous epistles from crusty old bachelors; unmarried women, whose years had passed three-score-and-ten, found themselves objects of young men's admiration as ardently expressed in love-letters. Enemies received invitations to each other's homes, friend upbraided friend for imaginary grievances. The writing in each case was so like that of the person whose signature it bore that it deceived those most familiar with its characteristics. The air was rife with assertions, contradictions, and imprecations; but the author of the disturbance was never traced. Of this useful accomplishment, practised with so much success, the young curate now bethought himself; and one day signed the name of a county magnate at the bottom of a cheque for a considerable sum, and was therefore able to evade ruin for some time. The amount not being sufficient to entirely free him from debt, he wrote another. The game was played once too often, the forgery was traced to its writer, who being brought to justice, was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude."

Colonel Tarbert paused. Glender's eyes flamed with light, his face became pale from suppressed passion. Leaning across the table he asked in a hoarse voice:

"Why tell me this wretched story of my life,



have you come here like a bloodhound to hunt me down?"

Colonel Tarbert pushed back his chair. Glender's face was no pleasant sight; his voice had a dangerous ring.

"No," he said, striving with an effort to laugh; "a guilty conscience makes you nervous. I merely wished to let you know I was aware of your talent, which I want you to exercise on my behalf."

"You want me to——"

"Sign another person's name to a cheque. That is all."

Glender lay back in his chair with evident relief. He passed his square thick-jointed hand across his face, then suddenly asked, "How did you learn my secret?"

"By accident," replied the colonel.

"Don't parry words with me now; answer my question."

"The county magnate whose name you forged told me the story as an instance of misapplied talent and wasted energy; as a tale, in fact, pointing a moral and so forth. He had no idea I had the pleasure of your acquaintance, is unaware of your adopted name, indeed, lost sight of you since—since you stood in the dock as a felon."

Jacob Glender winced again, and the bones of his massive jaw moved as if he ground his teeth.

"Then how did you know I was the man to whom he referred?"

Colonel Tarbert smiled. "I have," he replied, "a habit of putting two and two together. From the description given of your person, which is not common, from a certain air of the cleric which hangs round you still, and from the date of your appearance in London, I suspected that the Reverend Amos Berkeley and Mr. Jacob Glender were one and the same person. I didn't



know it for a fact until I received the assurance from your lips."

The two men stared at each other. Greek had met Greek.

"Then," said Glender, "you have entrapped me."

"Say, rather that in a moment of excitement you confided in me."

Glender stood up from the table and went back to his station by the chimney-piece.

"You have more brains than I expected," said the colonel pacifically.

"You will not change your mind before you have finished with me."

"No; believe me you have risen in my estimation considerably."

"Now," said Glender, with sudden vehemence, "cut that chaff and tell me like a man if you mean to expose me."

"As I intend making use of you, exposure would be against my policy."

"And if I refuse being made use of?" Glender replied sullenly.

"It never occurred to me you would be so unreasonable. Sit down again; you will heed me better when more at your ease."

Glender flung himself into a chair with dogged surliness. "You have the upper hand of me to-day," he said fiercely, "but beware how you use it."

"I shall use it for my own advantage," replied the colonel; "and," he added after a pause, "for yours if you please."

"I don't know what you're aiming at, but there's one thing I'll tell you, I'm not going to risk penal servitude again; no more of that for me."

"Not even to oblige a friend," said the colonel, laughing scornfully. The manner in which the words



were spoken and the laughter succeeding them, roused Glender once more.

"Have done with your irony," he said, striking the table with his clenched fist, "or by heavens, I shall not be answerable for my acts."

"It is wonderful to consider," remarked the colonel with increased coolness, "how strong is the force of old habits. Even in your case some recollections of your profession in the past is responsible for mention of a place in which you have no faith in the present, no hope of reaching in the future. But lest I engage too much of a time greatly occupied in advising unwary but adventurous spirits, I must come to the object of my visit. That you may the better understand my position, I must briefly narrate some autobiographical details; they will serve as a return for the confidence with which you were good enough to entrust me."

Glender leaned his elbow on the table, screening his eyes with his hand.

"You are perhaps aware," said the colonel, "that my father, Lord Kerry, is a very wealthy man. He is not, nor has he ever been a wicked earl, squandering his money in ways known to the devout as unworthy. On the contrary; he invested largely and profited much; cultivated his property so as to increase its value, and hoarded his savings with the instincts of a miser. To my elder brother, Lord Tralee, a man after his own heart, he is liberal; to me he makes a beggarly allowance of eight hundred a year. He has, I must confess, paid my debts more than once, with extreme bad grace and much good advice. But he has positively refused to repeat this kindness now when I am pestered with duns and don't know which way to turn for a penny. Everything which hereditary taste and early training have led me to appreciate is expensive. I have heard of a man who lived on sixpence a day and



wrote a book on the subject; but existence supported on such a sum would be impossible to me. I have mortgaged my annuity; the Children of Israel, wise in their generation, will no longer lend me a shilling; the horse you recommended me to back was scratched. I strove to marry a fortune the other day and was unsuccessful; my brother to whom I haven't spoken for years, wouldn't give a shilling to save my life. Though my friends may not see the necessity of it, yet I must live; and living, pander to general prejudices by dressing as my fellow-creatures. In fact I must have money."

"So it seems," said Glender, who had cooled down considerably; "but how can I help you?"

"Not by your advice, no more of that, but by your actions, by the actions of your clever hand."

"I told you I shan't risk penal servitude again?"

"Bah," said his hearer, "it's not a mere commonplace forgery I'm about to suggest; as for danger there shall be none—to you."

"How is that?" asked Glender.

"I am not generally considered a fool," continued the colonel; "had I lived a century ago I should have been styled the ingenious Mr. Tarbert, but we have fallen upon an unappreciative age. Here am I dunned by the Hebrew race, threatened by tradesmen, my custom declined by tailors, whilst my father has more money at his disposal than he can spend. He is rich; I am poor. He refuses to give me even a small share of his wealth; why should I not therefore help myself from his abundance?"

"How?" said Glender with interest

"By strategy. A month ago I went to Ireland and made personal application to him for funds; he refused me. Last week I wrote again, telling him I should be ruined, and have to pass through the bankruptcy court, or eke out a miserable existence in a cheap foreign



town, if he didn't pay my debts. I promised if he gave me three thousand pounds I should be more careful in future, should certainly amend my ways. Here is his answer received this morning," continued the colonel, producing a letter and reading it aloud: "'DEAR ROBERT,—Your application for the sum mentioned surprises and displeases me. I have paid your debts three times, and on the last occasion told you emphatically I should not do so again. I shall not change my resolution, and you must endure the difficulties you have brought upon yourself. Your extravagance, from your youth upwards, has been a source of regret to me, will prove a cause of humiliation to you some day.—Your affectionate father, KERRY.'"

"The old man is in earnest," added Jacob Glender, grimly.

"Yes, his letter is not only unpleasant but unjust. Now here is what he should have written," added the colonel, referring to a note he had scribbled in his pocket book: "'Dear Robert, I regret you have found it necessary to ask me for money again. You seem to forget I paid your debts for the third time two years since. Your extravagance seems to increase instead of diminish. However, I inclose you a cheque for the sum requested, on the distinct understanding that I shall not in future be expected to give you further help, no matter what your difficulties.—Your affectionate father, KERRY.'"

"Very neat," said Glender appreciatively.

"Now that is what he should have written, what he shall write."

"You cannot force him."

The colonel raised his eyebrows and smiled. "How dull you are," he remarked.

Glender thought a moment, then threw himself back in his chair and laughed. "'Pon my honour," he ex-



claimed, his former surliness entirely vanishing, "you are a genius."

"You see what I mean," said the colonel triumphantly. "You possessing an accomplishment which has rendered you famous, will copy my father's writing on a pen such a note as I have sketched, inclosing a cheque for five thousand pounds. You will cross the Channel to-night, proceed to Ballyfrain, where he lives, and post this letter. I shall have no second confidant. Next day I shall receive the communication, present the cheque, pay my debts and be a free man again. Should my father, in course of time, forget he had sent me the money—for at his age memory is not at its best—I shall have his letter bearing the postmark of Ballyfrain, to prove he sent it me. Should he in a moment of rage and suspicion pronounce the cheque and letter forgeries, he will doubt the honour and honesty of his son. This is possible, for fathers, I regret to say, are not what they have been or should be; but that he should question my virtue and reputation in a public court is inconceivable."

"In this skilful arrangement," said Glender thoughtfully, "there is one little particular you have quite overlooked."

"And that?"

"My reward."

"No. The mention of it was merely postponed. I shall deal liberally with you. You shall have two hundred pounds for your trouble."

"Two hundred fiddlesticks," replied Glender contemptuously. "Do you think I'm a baby?"

"Believe me, such an idea never occurred to me. I think this sum will fully compensate your services; remember you run no risk."

"Risk or no risk, I refuse to meddle in this affair for such a paltry sum."



"If you refuse——"

"Well?"

"There are certain awkward facts in your history with which you may not desire your clients to become acquainted."

Glender laughed defiantly. "Two can play at that game," he said. "Should you wish your father to learn you had asked me to forge his name?"

"He would not believe you," answered the colonel.

"Not if I repeated the words of his letter and laid bare your plot? Come, don't let us quarrel over a few pounds whilst a decent sum remains for each of us. You will not risk asking anybody else to help you; if you were skilful enough to imitate your father's writing you wouldn't have come to me. Give me a cheque down for five hundred pounds, and the thing is done; if not, I swear I'll never put pen to paper for you."

He held out his hand across the table. The colonel saw he was in earnest, and after a second's hesitation grasped the extended palm in ratification of the bargain.

"Now," said Glender, "the sooner 'tis done the better. Give me Lord Kerry's letter," he added in a business-like manner, and taking the epistle to the light he examined it carefully, line for line, letter for letter, the up strokes and down strokes, the crossing of the t's, the curling tails of the y's. Finishing his scrutiny, he took down a blotting-pad, pen and ink from a little bookshelf, and by way of testing his pen and giving proof of his skill, wrote on the back of an old envelope the words, "Your affectionate father, Kerry," over and over again. His heavy face brightened over his work, and it was with evident enjoyment he regarded the fruit of his skill.

"You see," he said, with pride, "a forger, like an artist, is born not made. He serves no apprenticeship



his craft comes to him by inspiration and is perfected by practice. Both observe closely and imitate faithfully—the artist nature, the forger penmanship. Now, looking at this note of Lord Kerry's, I first take into consideration the size and proximity of, or distance between each letter. Then must also be considered the formation of capitals, loops and curves, peculiarities in shaping certain characters, general individuality of style, always making allowance for the fact no man writes his name twice in exactly the same way."

As he spoke he wrote, slowly and with care, the words, "Dear Robert," and then held the envelope on which it was written at some distance from him and afterwards close to his face, that he might view it in different effects of light. Satisfied with his work, he handed the paper to Colonel Tarbert, who regarded it with surprise and admiration.

"It's a fac-simile of the old man's handwriting," he said, "and defies detection."

Glender smiled grimly, feeling proud of his accomplishment, but like a true artist was dissatisfied with his best efforts. Therefore, for upwards of an hour he continued copying Lord Kerry's letter with care, repaid by satisfaction. "I am getting on the track of his lordship's style," he remarked; "don't you think this is something like it?"

"I shouldn't know it from my father's."

"Now let us come to business."

Colonel Tarbert looked at him questioningly.

"You have brought your cheque-book, I suppose?"

"I happen to have it with me."

"Good. Then before I begin to work write me a cheque for five hundred pounds, payable to—to James Smith. If there is any trouble afterwards it is just as well Jacob Glender should not be mixed up with it; you know experience makes a man cautious."



"You don't trust me to pay you when I receive the cash?"

"Business is business," said the other evasively.

"But if this little game of ours shouldn't turn up trumps, you will hold my cheque."

"Which will be useless if there are no funds to meet its demands. I will trust you, in case all goes right, not to pay away the five thousand until I have had my mite."

The colonel sat upright in his chair, and putting his head on one side meditatively, said, "How mistrustful is human nature. Here are we transacting for our mutual benefit a little business which popular prejudice would term felony, and yet we have not confidence in each other's good faith. Ah, what an age we live in, to those who think deeply, it is most melancholy, my friend."

"The cheque-book," replied Glender.

"Ah yes, we must put such sad if instructive considerations aside."

"Will you or will you not write the cheque?"

"How impatient you are. Of course I'll do anything to oblige you—anything in reason."

He took out his book, and without further words wrote and signed a cheque for the sum stipulated. Glender read it carefully, folded and put it away in his pocket-book.

"Now," he said, "how about the cheque which I am to fill for you?"

"I have it with me," answered the colonel, producing it from a letter case, and handing it across the table.

"You both bank with Coutts."

"Yes, but this cheque is not taken from my book. If it were, its number might afterwards be traced to me, and lead my father to suspect he really had not,



acting on a generous impulse, sent me the money. I have provided against such a mistake. This cheque is taken from my father's book."

Glender regarded him with admiration, feeling there was pleasure and security in working with so clever a partner.

"How did you get it," he asked.

"I'll tell you. I never act without consideration. Haste lays a man open to detection. With time comes thought, with thought caution. It is want of reflection which causes half the people in durance vile to suffer a sad separation from their less clever but more fortunate fellow-creatures. As I already told you, I crossed the Channel some weeks ago, that I might see my father and personally request he would pay my debts. On his refusal, the problem of a rich father and a poor son, which I have already had the pleasure of laying before you, occurred to me; and I asked myself if there was no way of conjuring or forcing the old man to my wishes. A few days before leaving England I had heard the story of your case—I mean of the misfortune which befell the Rev. Amos Berkeley, and the anecdote still floating in my mind suggested forgery as the means by which some of my father's money might become mine. For some time I did not determine on the act; but one day, whilst alone in the library, I saw his cheque-book lying on his desk. The value a blank cheque taken from it would prove to my purpose, flashed upon my mind. I instantly secured one, and from the moment of its possession I burned to utilize it. I strove to imitate my father's writing but could not succeed; my eagerness to use his cheque sharpened my wits, and led me to discover Amos Berkeley under the guise of Jacob Glender."

"I shouldn't mind g ing partner with you in any job," said Glender.



"Really," replied the colonel, reverting to the ironical manner he had dropped for the moment.

"Now," said Glender, "I'll fill up the cheque; don't speak to me until it's done." In a few minutes he had accomplished his purpose to their mutual satisfaction.

"It's a work of art," said the colonel. "The old man will think twice before he repudiates it as a forgery. Now write the letter, and we shall have finished an excellent morning's work."

Then Glender penned the note purporting to come from Lord Kerry to his son, inclosing him a cheque; it was written on paper bearing the family crest, which the colonel had provided. When this was finished, and its envelope addressed, Colonel Tarbert put Lord Kerry's genuine letter in his breast pocket. "You will carry out the remainder of the scheme carefully," he said. "Leave Euston by the six-thirty this evening; you will arrive in Dublin early in the morning, and then take train for Ballyfrain, post the forged letter, and your business is accomplished."

"It shall be done," replied Glender.

"Now I must go," said the colonel, rising and turning towards the window. "What a view you have here!" he continued. As he stepped across the room with his eyes directed to the Thames and the Surrey shore, he drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and at the same time, unseen by him, two envelopes fell softly on the carpet.

Glender saw them, and stepping swiftly towards the window, flung the sash open. "Yes," he remarked, "the view is pleasant on a fine day. If you lean forward you can see St. Paul's."

The colonel stretched out his head, and at the same time Glender, stepping back, picked up the envelopes and put them in his pocket.

"There's Big Ben striking two," said the colonel.



withdrawing from the window and crossing to the centre of the room. As he did, a knock sounded at the door.

"Who's there?" asked Jacob Glender.

"It's I," answered a woman's voice.

Glender went forward, unlocked and opened the door, saying to the colonel by way of explanation, "It's only my wife."

In another second a young woman with a fresh fair complexion and bright brown hair, entered the apartment, carrying some light parcels in her arms. Seeing a stranger present, she hesitated and looked towards Glender nervously.

"It's all right," he said brusquely; "get into the other room."

Crossing to accomplish this purpose she dropped one of the parcels from her arms. The colonel stepped forward and handed it to her with a bow. As she thanked him their eyes met, then a vivid blush crept into her cheeks and she passed into the adjoining chamber. Glender walked towards the entrance-door and held it open for his guest, as if anxious for his departure.

"Come and see me the moment you return to town," said the colonel.

Glender nodded. "I shall not lose sight of you until I have pocketed the reward of my labour."

Colonel Tarbert laughed as he descended the narrow stair, feeling satisfied with the work he had accomplished, and hopeful of its results.

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## CHAPTER V.

### JACOB GLENDER'S MISSION.

JACOB GLENDER left Euston Station *en route* for Holyhead by the evening train. He had settled himself



cosily in the corner of a second-class carriage, and having provided himself with comfort and amusement in the shape of a flask of brandy and some sporting papers, felt satisfied with himself and the world at large.

The task on which he was engaged commended itself to his mind from the completeness of its conception and promptness of its execution. To make five hundred pounds in a space of time he characterized as "the twinkling of a sheep's tail," was in itself an excellent achievement; to have security guaranteed him through the circumstances of the undertaking, completed his satisfaction. He had been engaged in no neater or more profitable work for some time. The sums derivable from confiding sportsmen anxious for correct tips, dwindled into insignificance beside this *grand coup*. No scruples regarding the dishonesty of his proceedings for a moment disturbed his inward complacency or detracted from his sense of elation.

He had accomplished an excellent piece of workmanship, and dwelt fondly on the artistic finish of his imitation. "The old man must have eyes like Old Nick," he said, "if he discovers it's a—it's not his own writing," Glender finished, avoiding even in thought the adoption of an ugly word. Mentally he reviewed the scene which had taken place a few hours ago in his rooms, giving credit to Colonel Tarbert for his ingenuity and boldness.

The reflection that his past was known to this man troubled him, and he cursed himself that he had so readily betrayed the secret of his identity with one who had spent portion of his life in a convict prison. He consoled himself after some consideration by the belief Colonel Tarbert would not, for his own interests, betray him. "If he blabs," added Jacob, "it will be tit for tat."



Suddenly he thought of the letters he had obtained, they having until that moment escaped his memory. Thrusting his hand into the pocket of his coat, he pulled out two envelopes. The first contained Lord Kerry's letter, dated two days before. Glender smiled delightedly at the prize which had unexpectedly come into his possession. "This is worth keeping safely," he said; "it will serve to checkmate the colonel should he threaten to give me trouble or strive to play me false. It is a clear proof the old man declines to give him a penny, though two days later he sends him five thousand pounds. And then his lordship's writing is interesting as a study. I shouldn't feel surprised if I required it as a model some other day." Having carefully read the letter he replaced it in his pocket and took out the second envelope. It was directed to Colonel Tarbert in a firm, heavy hand, bold in its upstrokes, but feminine and dainty in its curves. It was at once original, peculiar, and indicative of strong characteristics.

Having made handwriting a study, Jacob Glender seldom forgot the peculiarities of each writer he had known. As he gazed at the letters before him his face alternately expressed surprise, doubt, and speculation. Something strangely familiar in the characters fascinated him, and yet they were not those of the person with whom he would at first have identified them. The envelope had been opened, and he drew forth its contents hesitatingly, as one who expects a revelation for which he is unprepared. The evidence he sought was not disclosed to him. The envelope merely contained a square card bearing a printed invitation, "Gal Alex. At home, Tuesday, June 2nd. Nine o'clock. Music.—R.S.V.P." The only writing it bore was Colonel Tarbert's name.

Replacing the card in its envelope Glender put it in



his pocket, lay back in the carriage and gazed absently out of the window. Broad fields, where the verdure of young spring shot from the brown earth, comfortable homesteads half hidden among orchard trees, red-roofed cottages enclosed by well-trimmed hedges, churches with square towers, chapels with tall spires, cattle standing knee-deep in clover, boys fishing in canals, children playing in fair meadow lands, youths bathing in a pond, hamlets in sheltered valleys, manor-houses surrounded by woods—all swept past Glender's sight unheeded. The writing on the envelope acted as a talisman, by which he travelled faster than steam might carry him. Space and time were for him annihilated; the present vanished, the past existed, peopled by faces and forms familiar to its days, but known no more. The defiant look in his eyes died out like fires extinguished, the hard lines round his mouth softened.

By degrees he was roused from his reflections by the regular snoring of a fellow-passenger opposite him. A young man, with his head thrown back and his mouth wide open, was sleeping soundly. On the rug wrapped round his knees lay a novel with a sensational picture on one cover. This attracted Glender, and stretching forward he lightly removed the book, and read its title and author's name, "Give me Your Hand," by Gal Alex. He started at the coincidence; then opening the volume looked at the title-page, and saw Gal Alex was the writer of half-a-dozen stories mentioned. With curiosity and interest he slowly turned over the leaves, as if he thought some clue to his thoughts might, like a subtle essence, escape them.

By degrees the snoring of his fellow-passenger subsided, the young man moved uneasily, and then opened his eyes.



"Beg your pardon," said Glender, "I have been looking at this book whilst you slept."

The youth nodded drowsily.

"Good novel?" asked Glender, who having no acquaintance with fiction, regarded it with wholesome contempt. To him all novels were fairy tales written for grown-up children.

"It is interesting."

Glender hesitated, and then with an anxiety he strove to conceal asked, "Is Gal Alex the name of a man or a woman?"

"I don't know; it sounds like a *nom de plume*. I should say from its style the book was written by a man."

"But you are not certain?"

"No."

Glender offered the volume to its owner, who being desirous of another nap, declined it; therefore Jacob retained possession, and read it here and there lightly, expecting to be bored, after the fashion of a critic. Occasionally as he met a sentence seeming strangely familiar in its expression, a thought characterized by an individuality not wholly new, he laid down the novel and thought. And so he continued puzzled and anxious until overcome by sleep, he dozed and dreamed. The visions presenting themselves to his mind were of no pleasant character; from time to time he muttered defiant words, frowned angrily, ground his teeth, and at last woke with a cry.

It was near six o'clock the following evening when Jacob Glender arrived at the village of Ballyfrain. The atmosphere was rife with a sense of profound calm and happy rest, emphasized by the notes of a solitary thrush hidden in the branches of a sycamore tree. Ballyfrain was built upon a hill, at the foot of which stood the rural inn; entrance to this hostel was gained by a porch supported by pillars, and surmounted by the arms of the



house of Kerry carved in wood, and painted in colours once brilliant, now faded. Three steps led from the porch to the public room, flanked on one side by the bar, with its painted barrels and shining rows of glasses. By the opposite wall stood a long deal table, white from frequent scouring; beside it, on either side, forms of equal length. To the right a winding stair led to the upper part of the house, whilst a door to the left communicated with an apartment known as the parlour, where the gentry drank grog on market days and visitors had their meals served.

In this room, with its sanded floor, spotless muslin curtains half covering its small paned windows, pots of musk and fuchsia, Glender had dined. The meal enjoyed and despatched, he had grown weary of his loneliness, and anxious to fulfil his mission, sauntered into the public room. The landlady, a young and buxom bride, rosy-cheeked and bright-eyed, smiled at him pleasantly from behind the bar.

"Is the place always so quiet as this?" he asked, feeling solitude somewhat irksome.

"No, sir," she answered, "but the company seldom comes here before nine o'clock, save on Sunday evenings."

He raised his eyes towards an ancient time-piece in a mahogany case, standing within the bar like a privileged friend. It was half-past eight.

"The clock is fast, I have me doubts," she said, "for the post-boy comes down from the Hall at quarter-past-eight reg'lar, and I haven't seen sight of him yet."

"Then a mail leaves Ballyfrain to-night?"

"No, but one goes out at five in the morning, and the letters from the Hall are posted at half-past eight; and any that come by the six train are taken to his lordship."

This was information which Glender needed; he would



post his letter to Colonel Tarbert immediately. "The post-office is near?" he asked.

"Half-way up the hill."

"A pretty place," said Glender, moving towards the door and glancing at the white-washed houses, each surrounded by its strip of garden.

"Yes, sir; his lordship likes to have it called the model village, Some London newspaper men were over here last year and praised it, and his lordship was so pleased he wrote to thank them."

Glender sauntered into the street and ascended the hill. He had not gone many yards when he saw a man in semi-livery with a leather bag strapped round his shoulders advancing towards him. They met at the post office, and Glender, taking the forged letter from his pocket, dropped it into the box. With a light heart he proceeded on his way, rejoicing as he went, and half an hour later returned by a circuitous route to the inn. The bar was lighted by a couple of lamps, whilst a third, tin-shaded and hanging from the beamed ceiling, half revealed the figures of a dozen men sitting round the deal table. Glender's coming seemed to have been anticipated, and a rustle of gratified expectancy welcomed him. At a glance he saw they chiefly consisted of out-door retainers belonging to a great house, and was not sorry to have an opportunity of hearing some details of the family they served. Having greeted them collectively, ordered some beer, and filled his pipe, he seated himself at the end of one of the long forms, and opened the conversation by remarks on the weather.

"Thru for you, an' 'tis a grand time for the country," said a man sitting opposite Glender. Short, thick, hedge-like whiskers protected a face which though wrinkled, preserved an expression of youthfulness derived from lack of thought and absence of vice. The upper part of his body was clad in a corduroy waistcoat



with sleeves, a spotted handkerchief was w his neck, and a shapeless cap pushed on the head. He was evidently the spokesman of and was addressed by his companions as Dan.

"I'll make so bould as to say you're a stranger to these parts," he remarked to Glender.

"I have not been here before."

"I thought as much," said Dan, glancing at his friends to ascertain if they remarked his shrewdness ; consciousness of which made his eyes twinkle in self-congratulation.

"An' I venture to say now, you knows how to handle the reins."

"Well," replied Glender, smiling as he remembered some phases of his Oxford days, "I have done some coaching in my time."

Dan smiled at his companions with the air of a barrister impressing a favourable point on a jury.

"Maybe," he continued, "you're in search of a job?"

"Well, I have just finished one."

Dan slapped one hand on his right knee to mark the satisfaction he felt at his keenness. Those around whispered favourable comments on his abilities as an observer; he rose in the opinion of his fellows.

"Well," said he, "you've come to a bad place in search o' work. There's only one family hereabouts worth talking of, a mighty reputed family, that sticks to ould ways, an' has them in its service as were with them man an' boy, an' their fathers afore them. Meself has been in the stables these forty year, an' me father was there too, as long as he lived."

"Things differed in his day," added the undergardener reflectively.

"Sure enough," answered a voice from the shade.

"I suppose you're speaking of Lord Kerry's place?" remarked Glender.



"What else," replied Dan.

"And you say things have changed with the family," continued Jacob, who began to fear Colonel Tarbert's account of his father's wealth was exaggerated. "Is the present lord poor?"

A wood-ranger at the lower end of the table laughed scornfully, and set the stranger down as one steeped in ignorance.

Dan being more compassionate, condescended to explain. "No," said he, "there never was one richer of his name. No better landlord lives, an' his rents are paid reg'lar; but since her ladyship's death he lives quiet."

"Well, his father was a gay man, an' a'most ruined hisself," said the under-gardener, "I heered tell how he druve the king as was in his day, with the crown on his head, 'an the unicorn an' lion at his feet, all through London town in a coach an' six: an' a grand sight it was."

"It must have been," remarked Glender quietly.

"But the present lord," said Dan, "never cared for the company o' kings an' horses an' the like, but lived always steady an' wise an' respectable."

"An' Lord Tralee, a poor sick-hearted man," continued the under-gardener, with a ring of contempt in his voice, "he takes after his father."

"We never see much of him," added Dan. "He lives mostly in foreign parts, which don't seem natural for such as he."

"An' did you ever hear nothin' of him?" asked the under-gardener mysteriously.

"No," replied Glender, his curiosity aroused.

"Weil, they do say," said Dan, and then pausing he turned towards his friends as if waiting their acquiescence before communicating his news.

"Aye, tell him," said a chorus of voices.

"Well, they do say he wrote a book o' rhymes, but



he wouldn't put his name to it, fearing them as makes money by the like should be ashamed of such good company."

"Aye, he was always a considerate man."

"Where is he now?" asked Glender.

"Above in the Hall; he came home a week ago to-day, isn't it, Ned?"

"Aye, a week ago sure enough as the church clock struck two; an' he brought a foreign man with him as his vallet, an' he comes from parts that distant, that spake to him as loud as you plaze, the never a word he understands o' what you're saying."

"Is he an Indian?" Glender inquired.

"Well, not so much as that; he's dressed in Christian clothes right enough."

"I suppose Lord Tralee will soon marry?"

"I have me doubts o' that," answered Dan. "A man as delicate as him has no heart for marriage."

"Hasn't Lord Kerry another son?" queried Glender.

"Sure enough he has, the colonel. They say he'd spend a hatful o' gould every day if he had it; but he was never a favourite with the ould lord, an' it's a tight rein he holds on him."

"I suppose he comes here sometimes?"

"Well, not often; and may be," added Dan reflectively, "it's better for the village he didn't."

As he finished speaking the sound of a horse's hoofs galloping at great speed fell upon their ears, and then ceased. The under-gardener going to the door looked down the street, where in the faint light he saw a horse and its rider draw up at a low square house. The rider dismounted, and in a couple of minutes another man came hurriedly from the dwelling, vaulted into the saddle, and rode hurriedly up the hill.

"It's some one for the doctor, an' he's gone towards the Hall," said the under-gardener.



His companions rose from the table, and coming into the street, stood round the porch. Glender followed them. The man who had ridden for the doctor was now seen walking quickly up the hill. Dan went forward, questioned him eagerly, and presently returned with a sober air and solemn face.

"It's the ould lord has a fit an' is dying," he said.

A chorus of murmurs greeted his words. The news spread rapidly through the village. A young moon rose in the sky, the hill was chequered by light and shadow, the air grew soft and balmy with the scent of laburnum and sycamore trees. Men and women stood in mournful groups before their houses, awed by the evil news suddenly conveyed to them concerning one they regarded with affection. Mentally they speculated about their future fate under his successor. A second groom galloped speedily down the hill in search of a dispensary doctor. They listened in silence to the sound of his horse's hoofs along the high road till it was lost in distance. The succeeding stillness seemed ominous. Women whose lives the kindly old man had brightened, prayed for him now in his hour of need; men recounted his good deeds. The church clock struck eleven with a sonorous tone like the voice of Time itself. At such an hour the village was usually wrapped in slumber, now none thought of retirement or rest; all awaited a feared event. As no news came from the Hall the under-gardener volunteered to make inquiries, and set forward for the purpose. As he did a solitary figure was seen in the semi-light to pass down the hill, pause before the church, and unlock its heavy iron gateway leading to the grave-yard. Then suddenly the church bell began to toll—softly as if reluctant to bear sad news; solemnly as became sounds imparting a message of death.



## CHAPTER VI.

## AWAKENING.

IN the month of August Philip Amerton and Miriam Netley were married in the church of St. Mary Abbots, Kensington. Mrs. Netley had given a reluctant consent to the union. Immediately after the ceremony the bride and bridegroom had departed for the continent, where they proposed making a prolonged stay. They had spent the autumn in Germany, the winter in Rome, and now in March had taken up their residence in Florence.

During the seven months which had elapsed since their union, a change not less subtle than certain had occurred in Amerton's existence. For the first weeks of his married life a heretofore unknown happiness filled his days. The calmness of irrecoverable decision succeeding changeeful resolution, fell upon him soothingly. Peace sat enthroned in his heart as light in the sun; and for him all nature became articulate with words of gladness. Looking hopefully forward to years of perfect felicity, intensified his present bliss. The woman he loved was his source of happiness; the daylight of his soul shone from her eyes; her footsteps paved the world with joy.

Could this dream have continued, life would have held for him no future sorrow, the world no care. But as in lighter sleep the consciousness of external surroundings blend with our imaginings, so he, knowing the uncertainty of human felicity, became fearful its duration might be brief for him; and his very fears the sooner aroused him from placid contentment. With this awakening he had struggled hard, shutting his eyes as it were against the cold light of dawn, like one just roused from slumber seeking fresh repose. He



strove in vain to lull his senses to their former state; the happy dreams would not return again.

Slowly and gradually a numbing sense of disappointment fatal to ardent love crept into his life. By degrees the cruel truth broke on his mind that in the fervour of his imagination he had idealized his wife even as a painter spiritualizes a picture. It was painful to feel, she who was nearest to him amongst his kind, dearest to him by laws human and divine, failed to understand him. His morbid introspection and keen sensibility exaggerated a grief which a philosopher would have accepted as an attribute of matrimony, or a man of the world regarded as relief. Some subtle link was lacking in the chain which should have bound their lives in a supreme harmony. This truth was forced upon him daily in ways small in themselves yet irresistible in their conviction. Now it was a thought he expressed she failed to follow; a feeling with which she could not sympathize; an enthusiasm she was unable to share. Objects or sights which awoke in him emotions of profound reverence or vivid joy, left her cold and indifferent; pleasures and pains that moved him strongly, escaped her less sensitive perceptions. Morning sunlight in a southern sky made the world full young to him; the moon with her airy light and mystic shadows lulled him to strange reveries. To her mind they caused neither vigorous elation nor dreamy delight.

Lacking gifts he possessed she could not enter with him into the world of imagination and phantasy which filled so large a space in his life; and when he would have soared, a commonplace phrase, a jarring word, a senseless laugh, dragged him back shocked and pained to earth. His senses responded to finer influences than hers.

Because of her fresh beauty and a certain impulsive-



ness of manner he had loved her; and loving, had credited her with depths of feeling and subtle insights she never possessed. His imagination had blinded and deceived him, and he must suffer for his mistake. She could neither fathom the depths of his nature nor reach the heights of his love. With a heart too meagre for great affection, a mind too shallow for aught but reflection of the passing hour, she was powerless to banish isolation from his life; he was still desolate as before they had met. There were hours when, though she clung to him, he felt utterly alone; moments when, though she were present, a sense of solitude overwhelmed him with depression. At such times he would, by dwelling on his past life and speaking of his future hopes, plead as it were to her inner consciousness that she might rise to the summit of his higher nature, where companionship, inseparable in all things, might be obtained. But unable to divine his thoughts, she remained unaware she was not all to him she had been in the near past. Her lack of perception afforded him relief, and he conscientiously strove to sustain the illusion, though it cost continual strain.

On consideration he persuaded himself the blame of his disappointment lay more in his own nature than in his wife's lack of finer feelings. Intellect, he was aware, largely absorbs the power of loving. Certain it is with men of imagination, the brain with its world of phantasies, predominates over the heart with its natural affections. The swain loves better than the citizen; the man of denser mind than his more excitable brother. Something in the intangible airy nature of genius, a gift largely dependent on a peculiarly nervous and emotional organization, prevents its possessor, not from loving fervidly, but from loving long. His ardour is a meteor flashing with a brilliancy that exhausts its radiance. His passion may endure for a week or a year,



but sooner or later comes awakening, weariness, reaction, and regret. Fear and self-pity at thralldom, anxiety and longing for escape beset him. Few men and women with sacred fire in their hearts make loyal and loving spouses. Wherefore this should be, God knows.

Days there were when the consideration of his lost liberty weighed heavily upon Amerton. He was no longer a free agent accountable to himself alone for his acts; he had taken another life to himself, for the happiness or misery of which he was amenable. Formerly his sense of liberty, of irresponsibility, had been his delight: now, though the burden was of his own choosing, he was weighted; though his chain was golden, he was fettered. A little while before the world lay all before him; now the space allotted him was a narrow limit, bounded by the interests and inclinations of another being. The possibilities of life which had before helped to make it endurable, could hold no part in his existence since he had by marriage reached a climax in his fate. His youth seemed far removed as a distant landscape, and he looked back upon it with wistfulness, as a bird may peer 'twixt golden bars on leafy woods.

The glamour cast on his senses had for a time blinded him to the higher tendencies of his nature, making him relinquish limitless possibilities. Knowledge and power had been offered him, the secrets of nature were within his grasp, and in a moment of weakness he had turned from them to enjoy pleasures fleeting as a summer day, illusory as a morning dream. Instead of acquiring gifts that might have raised him above his kind, he had yielded to human love, and lost the real for the unreal.

Such thoughts rose to the surface of his mind as he leaned over the centre arch of the Ponte Vecchio in



Florence at an hour near midnight. He had spent the day in company with his wife at Fiesole, and had, longing for solitude when night descended, wandered alone through the quiet streets of the Tuscan capital. Passing the monastery of Santa Maria Novello, he had strolled leisurely towards the Piazza della Signoria, thence onward to the quays, and entering on the bridge, paused midway to follow the bent of his melancholy thoughts.

The moon had risen hours before, and now filled the cloudless sky and sleeping city with silver light. The Palazzo Vecchio lay deep in shadow as if mourning for the blood-stained scenes it had witnessed in bygone ages. The Arno, mirror-like, reflected the glory of white light, and bore the blurred shadows of this ancient bridge, with its heavy buttresses and now deserted shops.

Florence was at this hour silent as a city of the dead. In domes and towers of convents, monasteries, and churches, bells which had rung throughout the day with musical rhythm, now rested like singers tired of song. The clatter and hum of commerce had subsided like the tumult of a theatrical street scene when the curtain descends. The fever and fret of life had vanished, ebbed out as it were, with dying day; the passions of love and hate, greed and grudge slumbered, to awake with fresh force on the morrow. And here, wakeful while others slept, stood Amerton, a lonely figure, pondering over the troubled mystery of existence.

What, he wondered, was this emotion called happiness which all men sought and few men found; this elixir of life evading the search of philosophers and pedants, to seek the unsophisticated and the peasant; abiding not with wealth but endowing poverty; flying from civilization and dwelling with nature? Men had



in quest of it amidst desolate forests or within walls of monasteries, forsaken home and friends, opulence and honour. Savage tribes, inhabiting trackless regions, children of the elements, loyal and loving sons of nature, obedient to her teachings in all things, possessed its delights. The scarce more civilized peasant, the sane and healthful tiller of earth, whose books are writ in changing skies and the seasons' signs, whose pleasures crown his toils, whose pride is strength, whose simple faith holds naught with doubt, who in the fullness of his days lies down in the dust from which he sprung, unfretted by fears, hopeful of peace, tasted its joys. But before the footsteps of a civilization fretting men's minds with thoughts that harass, forcing them to unravel dark problems of fate, firing their brains with fevers knowing no allay, filling their hearts with dark doubts and questioning scepticisms, wearing their bodies with pleasures that speedily turn to pain yet long outlive desire, happiness vanished. Was there no escape from such a life?

He thought of Benoni, the man of wisdom and mystery, to whom his mind had lain open as a book, whose words had stirred depths within him such as the language of other men had left untouched, whose presence had quieted the tumult of his thoughts, whose promises had filled him with hope. "If there live within you," the mystic had written, whilst yet the fatal step in his life had not been taken, "strong desires for spiritual attainments, unconquerable yearnings for hidden knowledge, come to me and I shall set your footsteps on the pathway leading to light inextinguishable." And from this offer he had turned away. Could he but see Benoni now and confess the error he had made. But, alas, that could avail him nothing: he had sealed his own fate.

The clock from some neighbouring church chimed



midnight. Slowly and sadly Amerton moved away, and leaving the old stone bridge, walked along the quays towards his hotel. Scarce had he proceeded a dozen paces when, dimly seen in the shadows of tall houses, a solitary figure approaching arrested his attention. From the dress in which the man was clad Amerton at first believed him a monk returning from visiting the dying or praying by the dead, but as he drew nearer some familiar movement of the gliding tread caused him to stand still in expectation and astonishment. In another second the figure paused beneath a shrine, whose lamp threw flickering rays upon the sad, dark face of Benoni.

"It is I," he said, spreading his hands upon his breast in greeting.

"Dear friend," exclaimed Philip, "I have longed to see you."

"And I am here. Wherefore are you surprised? Have you already forgotten my words?"

"Some of them I remember too well for my own peace."

"Did I not say, in answer to the summons of your desires I should be with you?"

"How did my desires become known to you?"

"The soul invisible, intangible, subtle, incomprehensible, potent, is to the body what harmony is to the lyra. Its strings were touched; I caught their echo afar, and I am here."

Amerton looked at his dark impenetrable features, on which the red light flickered, and a thrill begotten neither of cold nor fear shot through him. By common consent they moved from the spot, and entering on the bridge, gained the centre arch, where Philip had stood a few minutes ago gazing on the waters, chequered by light and shadow.

"And," said Amerton, "the echo having passed out of my soul, you know the burden of its strain."



"I know you are not happy ; nay, my friend, I had foreseen you would not be content."

"Then," replied Amerton reproachfully, "why did you not act the part of a friend and warn me?"

"My words would have been lost in the ardour of your passion, and never reached the consciousness to which they were addressed."

"I was fated to marry?"

"Marriage was a probability in your life. No man, no matter how clear his sight into future events, might predict your union as a certainty. Until a foretold event is accomplished, it is not a fact. It lay in your power to avoid the possibility; you aided it of your own free will."

"And the result is bitter disappointment and keen regret."

"Life's shadows," said Benoni sadly, his rich voice subdued like music heard from afar.

Amerton looked down at the blurred reflection of the bridge upon the glittering tide, whose ripple, striking against the heavy buttresses, made a faint symphony in the silent night.

"Were you happy," continued the mystic, after a pause, "you would be an exception to humanity, an outcast from your kind, having no kin with the world at large."

"Why is humanity bereft of happiness?" Philip asked.

"My friend, the All Merciful were cruel were His children shut out from happiness. It is not beyond their reach, but seeking in external circumstances that which lies within them, they possess it not. Have you never heard heaven is a disposition, not a place? A king in his palace may be as miserable as a beggar in his hovel. Not rank nor riches, obscurity nor poverty, have power to create or banish bliss. The kingdom of



felicity lies in each man's heart; its name is contentment."

At the mystic's words, spoken with compassion, many thoughts drifted through Amerton's mind. He had sought happiness by binding another life to his own, and behold he had leant upon a reed. He had fled from the solitude of his own heart, and peace had deserted him. Knowledge, the key to all power, had been offered him, and he had withheld his hand. Truly, his mistake was fatal, his disappointment keen.

"What I most regret," he said aloud, "is that the possibilities of the life once open to me are closed for ever."

"Yet if you still were free, and the choice offered you some months ago lay before you again, your reply would be the same. Precept seldom, but experience ever teaches."

"It has taught me," he answered bitterly.

"Nay, my friend," said Benoni gently, "you have yet much to learn."

"Then teach me," demanded Amerton.

"Remember what I said but a second ago concerning precept and experience."

Amerton looked down on the shining waters; when he raised his eyes again, Benoni was observing him as if he would read his thoughts.

"You have voluntarily taken upon yourself responsibilities you must now fulfil. Meanwhile neglect not to cultivate your higher nature. Elevate your heart towards Him who sleepeth not, nor dieth; Him with whom rest the keys of all secret things. He will kindle a light within your soul which shall guide you through paths of doubt and darkness."

"Tell me," said Amerton eagerly, "is it impossible for me, having entered these bonds, to acquire occult



knowledge; to train the latent powers within me to perfection?"

"Not impossible. Ask me no more to-night; my time is short."

"When shall I see you again?"

"Some weeks hence."

"Not to-morrow?" asked Amerton, disappointedly.

"No," answered Benoni, shrinking within the shadows of an archway.

Amerton regarded him, and from having, as he believed, had his eyes so long fixed upon the running water, imagined Benoni's figure flickered and wavered before his gaze. The dark face became ethereal, the lustrous eyes clouded, the curves and folds of his garment blended with night.

"Benoni," he cried aloud, startled and amazed.

"Yes," replied the mystic, stepping forward, and instantly his figure became revived and solid once more, so that Amerton mentally reproached himself for the delusion his imagination had conceived.

"It is near morning," said Benoni, "and I must away."

Amerton left the archway and stepped forward to make room for Benoni on the narrow pathway, but no footfall sounded on his ear, and, turning round, he saw he was alone.

"Benoni," he cried out. But the only answer which came to him was the chime of many clocks ringing the first hour of day.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### CONCERNING LOVE AND MARRIAGE.

THE late Lord Kerry, whose death had taken place on the evening of Jacob Glender's visit to Ballyfrain, had



a younger brother, who in youth entered the army and spent many years in India. Returning from the East before his fiftieth year, with a ruined constitution, he had sold his commission and married a lady much younger than himself. And having begotten a son, he in a timely hour made his bow to an unappreciative world, and entered into the shades to receive rewards due to his deserts.

This son, Ulic Tarbert, was reared by his devoted mother, whose gentle disposition and good sense he largely inherited. Neither in appearance nor character did he resemble his father. Ulic had advanced in years a robust-minded lad, with little imagination but much gentleness, conceiving clear views of life, unlikely to be obscured or changed by the world's glare or opinion. The bent of a mind eagerly investigating all things coming within its observation, led him towards scientific pursuits, and of his own choice he elected to become a civil engineer.

My Lord Kerry, who had taken a kindly interest in the lad, which gradually ripened to friendship, had defrayed his college expenses, for which reason, as well as from his kinsmanship, he conceived himself entitled to select Ulic's profession. He was therefore displeased at this departure made by a scion of his house. Younger members had heretofore chosen to serve the church or enter the army, and Lord Kerry urged him to do likewise. The days of army patronage were over, it is true, but in the church his lordship had fat livings at his disposal. Ulic, however, had no liking for the art of warfare, and but scant reverence for the church temporal, and therefore declined following his uncle's advice. The head of the house had then suggested law as a profession not unworthy of his favourite; but Ulic had made his choice, and clear-sighted and strong-willed, resolved to follow its bent,



holding that in the selection of a calling or choice of a wife a man should be guided by his own wishes rather than by the judgment of his friends.

Before leaving college the great sorrow of his life had fallen on him in the death of his mother. He was now alone in the world, but his sense of solitude increased a resolve to beat out his life to the pattern of his desires. Leaving the university before taking his degrees he apprenticed himself to a firm of engineers, and shrank from no labour, avoided no hardship which might gain him experience in his calling. His mother's fortune of six hundred a year had been left to him, and loving independence and trusting to success, he had declined a further annuity which Lord Kerry had offered him. Having qualified as an engineer he had taken offices in the Sanctuary, Westminster, and starting on his own responsibility, prospered exceedingly with progress of time.

He was working in one of these rooms one morning in April when he was disturbed by a rap at the door; before he had time to reply a man entered.

"Amerton," he said, jumping from his chair and going forward eagerly to meet his friend, "I'm so glad to see you. I had no idea you were in town."

They shook hands heartily.

"We have been back three weeks."

The plural pronoun reminded Tarbert his friend was no longer a single man.

"You are both well, I hope."

"Yes, thanks," replied Amerton briefly; "and how are you?"

"I am well. The history of my life may be summed up in two words—hard work. Sit down in this easy-chair and make yourself comfortable."

"Any news since I left?" asked Amerton.



"Not much. My uncle's will has been proved; he left me ten thousand pounds."

"My dear fellow, I congratulate you."

"The colonel was merely left a thousand a year; you know he had previously been allowed eight hundred, so the advance is not considerable. But he seems in good spirits and in no want of money. I always avoid him when I can; the loathsome brutality and cruel cynicism of the man jars upon me. Poor Tralee, who is now Lord Kerry, has had a paralytic stroke, and has come to live in town. You must meet him some day; I know you would agree admirably. How the same parents could produce such dissimilar men as been always a wonder to me; it's one of the psychological problems that must give us pause. I like Kerry much, and we have always been friends. Pity he has such bad health. Now," he added, "tell me all about yourselves."

"Not to-day," answered Amerton uneasily. "I was passing, and thought I would look in and see you. How strangely familiar the room looks, it seems as if I had seen it but yesterday."

"Where are you staying?"

"I have taken a house in Campden Hill Road, close by High Street, Kensington; when we are settled you must come up and dine with us and we shall have a long chat."

"Ah, what a lucky fellow you are!"

"Lucky, why?"

"You are married," replied Ulic Tarbert simply.

"Oh, yes, of course, I had forgotten. But then marriage is a blessing within reach of every man."

"Not perhaps with the woman he wishes to make his wife."

"Well if not, with the wife who desires to make him her husband."



Amerto's words jarred slightly on his friend's ears.

"There's a difference I confess. Now your honeymoon has ended," continued Ulic, "I hope you will no longer be a dreamer amongst men."

"It's not easy to change one's nature."

"But having gained your wishes, you need no longer sigh for the moon. You have some one to stimulate your efforts, rejoice in your successes, soothe your weariness—"

"It strikes me Tarbert you are in love, and you picture I have all you desire."

"In love," repeated Ulic, laughing at the idea; "why I'm no more in love now than when I saw you last."

"Which may have been a good deal for all I know to the contrary."

"Will you come out and have lunch with me?" asked Ulic abruptly.

"Thanks, it's impossible to-day; I have an engagement at half-past one, and I must be off now."

When he had departed Ulic Tarbert sat down, but not to work. Thoughts entered into his mind which urged him to resolution.

Amongst his numerous and varied acquaintances were numbers of the opposite sex who became desperately anxious for his welfare, which to their minds alone consisted in the married state. Matrons with grown-up daughters loved him as a son and wooed him as a son-in-law. Maidens gentle and kind there were whose virginal hearts went out to him unsolicited, who would gladly have devoted themselves to his weal for sake of his income. But the tenderness so freely shown him he neither appreciated nor returned, and had wandered fetterless and fancy-free until he had encountered Gal Alex.

From the hour of their meeting life had changed for



him. To his sight the world had altered from a commonplace planet peopled with uninteresting inhabitants to a glorious sphere bright with possibilities of unrealized happiness. As seeds under sun-rays spring to flower, so what was best in his nature quickened under the warmth of love. Gal Alex had become the central object of his existence, round which his thoughts and hopes daily grouped themselves. But this new-found emotion was not a source of unchequered bliss. It had brought him happiness, but not peace; it had filled him with hope, but likewise with fear. For if Gal Alex had become aware of his affection she made no sign of her comprehension, though in a thousand ways he had striven to make its existence known.

That she would not understand him was plain. Believing it is as impossible for a woman to conceal as to counterfeit love, he had tried to read her heart; and though at times a word softly spoken, a look in her eyes, the pressure of her hand, seemed to indicate a warm feeling, yet her general manner towards him preserved what he considered a cool equilibrium of indifference. No man could love her more honestly, few men more fervently than he, but he reflected sadly, women were unreasoning, impulsive creatures, who frequently cared least for those who loved them best.

His indecision regarding her feelings became torture, and he resolved to learn his fate and end his doubt. A couple of weeks from the day on which Amerton had visited him, he drove to Kensington and called on Gal Alex. It was the one afternoon in the week she devoted to receiving her friends. On Ulic Tarbert's entrance he found the drawing-room crowded, principally with women. Each man present had his little circle of female worshippers, who echoed his words, reflected his smiles, and chaunted a chorus of laudation,



of which he and his achievements were the theme and motive. The representatives of mankind here assembled were scarce healthy specimens of the sex; and broad-shouldered, frank-faced Ulic Tarbert felt grateful he was not of their class.

His hostess had given him her hand in greeting, and with one bright glance assured him more fully than words could express of his welcome. Whilst he was building strong hopes on the foundation of this look, she inquired in a common-place manner if he would have some tea, and without waiting for reply handed him a dainty cup containing a spoonful of the beverage which cheers so many hearts in afternoon hours.

"I suppose you have seen the Amertons since their return?"

"Oh, yes," she answered.

"I have not," said Mrs. Rochester, a showily-dressed portly woman, who had recourse to art where nature failed to please her. "He will of course follow his wife about like a note of admiration for the first few months of their married life."

"They have already been wedded eight months."

"Oh, then," she replied with a musical laugh, "he will avoid her, and she will treat him with the supreme indifference which only a married woman can entertain for the man she has sworn to love, honour and obey."

Mrs. Rochester had in early life united herself with a man she detested, yet lived with on terms of perfect peace and seeming indifference before the world. Other women there are who, mated likewise, remain loyal, principally for the sake of throwing their husband's vices into broader relief, and triumphing over the frailties of their friends. But Mrs. Rochester, who possessed much common sense, soared above such petty, ungenerous, and selfish revenge; and with impulsive



liberality bestowed the tenderness due to her spouse on many favoured members of his sex. Clever, witty, and vivacious, society eagerly welcomed her company and soundly abused her character; a proceeding she returned by accepting its flatteries and repaying its detractions.

Born with a talent for scandal, she cultivated and exercised it, the better to please the friends of those she reviled. Indeed, her insinuations were frequently uttered, not so much from the desire of injuring those absent as of amusing these present; that the effect was equally fatal was a detail unworthy of her consideration. Yet none could charge her with uttering gross libels, even concerning those she hated most; her touch was ever delicate and skilful, like French art, leaving room for imagination to complete what outlines suggested. Though her personal history contained many shady chapters, her position in society remained unshaken. She had never wantonly outraged the conventionalities, she had ever vivaciously entertained her friends. All men admired her, and there were some women who did not hate her. Celebrities continually frequented her salon, and the world followed them thither. Under happier circumstances she might have been a better woman; even as they were, she would have been content had her feelings been less keen. To sensitive ears her laughter occasionally sounded as a wail; the tears it brought to her eyes might have risen from joy or sorrow. It was said she loved best those she slandered most.

She was talking to a little *papier-mâché* gentleman, all collar and legs, with only a few commonplace mottoes in his head where brains should have been. Exceedingly entertaining to himself, he believed he likewise fascinated others, and doled out dribblets of inanities to all who listened. Mrs. Rochester hastily brushed him aside, as one might a fly from the face,



when a middle-aged man with a bald head and youthful face approached her. This was a philosopher of the Optimistic school, who having achieved fame, was allowed to vent his opinions in the pages of the *Nineteenth Century*. Innocence abided in his heart; hope dwelt with him as a friend. To every husband he preached the doctrine of woman's fealty, for which every wife worshipped him, whilst many sought to convince him of the errors of his views.

"Mr. Phelps," said Mrs. Rochester, making room for him beside her on a low ottoman occupying a central position in the salon, "we have been talking of the Amertons, who have returned, and of love and marriage; now pray give us the benefit of your opinions on these subjects."

"Which are considered to have world-wide interest," said Gal Alex.

"Especially for women," remarked the youthful *papier-mâché* gentleman, his neck wriggling uneasily in his collar.

"Dear madam," replied Mr. Phelps, "not being a married man I cannot speak with authority on the topic."

"But those who look on see most of the game," said the hostess.

"Yet you will say it is only they who have endured martyrdom can recount its pains," added Mrs. Rochester, with one of those laughs her friends recognized as the danger signals of her speech.

"No, no," responded the philosopher seriously, "I am far from regarding the married state as a condition of torture; I rather believe it a goal of bliss."

"And your faith has been so strong as to prevent you entering the gateway of so much happiness, though it has been open to you these twenty years," remarked Mrs. Rochester.



Mr. Phelps laughed and blushed.

"Now," said she, "instead of declaring your faith in matrimony, I fancy you should have mentioned your fear of the bonds."

"How can we define this latter sentiment," he remarked by way of turning a conversation becoming too personal. "When Charles V. read on the tomb-stone of a Spanish noble an inscription, 'Here lies one who never knew fear,' 'Then,' said his majesty, 'he never snuffed a candle with his fingers.'"

"Now will you give us your opinion on marriage, Mrs. Rochester?" asked a young lady in a sad-coloured gown.

"I cannot, child," she answered readily. "I know of only one broad rule which should regulate wedded life. It is the duty of every husband to please his wife."

"And of every wife?"

"To please herself."

At this instant a movement took place at the door; guests departed and arrived.

"Here is Mrs. Netley," said Mr. Phelps.

"A self-made woman," replied Mrs. Rochester.

"A great man tells us——"

"Far more than he knows, I warrant."

"That it is better to be self-made than not made at all."

"And here is Lord Pompey," volunteered the young lady in sad-coloured garments.

"A bore," said Mr. Phelps, standing up.

"All men are bores when you don't want them."

"He is indeed a happy man," said the philosopher; "he falls in love with every woman he meets."

"And tries to reduce his age by increasing his folly."

Lord Pompey slowly advanced, a perpetual blush on his cheeks, a stereotyped smile parting his even rows of white teeth.



"How do you do, Lord Pompey;" said Mrs. Rochester holding out her hand.

"Ah, my dear lady, how are you?" he replied; adding in a perfectly audible voice, "Wonder who the deuce she is; never can remember faces."

"Will you not sit down, Mr. Phelps has departed."

"Thanks. So tired. We have been to hear the new Italian tenor; all tenors are poor to one who has heard Mario. Of course I didn't see him in his prime, but shortly before his retirement, when I was a very young man."

Mrs. Rochester laughed in a manner somewhat disconcerting to Lord Pompey, until she remarked, "Dear Lord Pompey, you are still young; your heart will never grow old."

"Charming woman," he said, giving his thoughts the benefit of words. Then continued in his conversational tone: "We went to see Lady Draggledrake's poodle performing a waltz to music of Strauss's band. Wonderful creature—the poodle; immense crowd; quite the rage this season; Lady Draggledrake delightful woman; looks eighteen."

"Yes, eighteen stone. Was her husband present?"

"Husband—never heard of him."

"It is said he is a most obliging man; he is never seen in his own house," said Mrs. Rochester, conveying a scandalous history by raising her brows and smiling a reputation away.

"He, he, he," laughed Lord Pompey, his simper rippling into a thousand wrinkles on his face.

"Lady Draggledrake, considering him such an excellent man, shows her appreciation for him in her admiration for his sex."

"Delightful. Tell me all about it," said Lord Pompey, eagerly. "I always took her for a prude."

"Dear Lord Pompey," cried his hearer compassion-



ately, "you know Voltaire says, 'when virtue is expelled from the heart, it takes refuge on the lips.'"

"Clever woman," said Lord Pompey, *sotto voce*, "wonder who she is; deuced good-looking still," he added, putting up an eye-glass to one of his dim glassy eyes and regarding her fixedly.

Maintaining a serious face, Mrs. Rochester, in whose heart the spirit of comedy dwelt, said as if to herself, "What a charming man is Lord Pompey."

"Eh," said he, "she's in love with me; deuced fascinating fellow I have always been, women could never withstand me; good style this woman—eh?"

"Dear Lord Pompey," she said aloud, "this is a wicked world in which we live; nothing compensates for the pain of existence but the enjoyment of affection." And she laid one hand carelessly, yet caressingly on his arm.

"Egad," he said, "she wants to marry me; they all do; delightful creature." Aloud he added, "True, dear madam, love should be the ruling power of our lives."

She looked at him tenderly, then suddenly lowered her eyes as if to hide a truth she was loth to reveal, holding her breath the while that her cheeks might assume a natural glow. An actress might have envied her powers. "My lot," she said, "has not been happy," and like many another player, she spoke in airy jest that which was sober truth.

"Gad," he said, "she is becoming sentimental. She'll talk of broken hearts and that sort of thing next; they all do."

"Had I," said she, letting her hand rest more heavily on his arm, "but one heart on which to repose, how happy should I feel."

"Delightful," he said. "Ah I am a sad dog."

"But one hand to guide me on my way."



Lord Pompey coughed, then tittered, and said, "Dear creature, take mine."

Mrs. Rochester drew back a few inches, and said sternly, almost tragically, "Do not trifle with my feelings."

"They all say that, but they don't mean it, not they," he remarked to himself.

"Because," she continued, with a sigh which was genuine, "I have a husband."

"You have," he exclaimed, with apparent relief. "How nice of you."

She glanced at him, striving hard to suppress her laughter.

"Do you know," he said, "I'm awfully fond of women with husbands; a little weakness of mine; they don't want to marry me."

"How unselfish of them."

"It is; but they can't very well without slighting the other fellow, and that would be bad taste; was once a husband myself and can understand the position."

"But you are not a husband now?" she demanded in tremulous tones, as if her future happiness depended on his answer.

"Not now; but soon shall be, I daresay."

"Who is she?" Mrs. Rochester asked, pressing her hand on the left side of her corset. "Who is the happy woman of your choice?" she added in a tone of gentle despondency.

Before he could reply, a loud voice summoned him from the siren's side.

"Oh, it's Mrs. Netley," he said meekly, rising with some difficulty and hurrying towards where the stout lady awaited him.

Mrs. Netley was talking to Gal Alex as Lord Pompey approached them. "Who," he asked, "is that clever



woman to whom I have been talking, she fell in love with me—he,—he,—divine creature.”

“Designing creature, you mean,” said Mrs. Netley severely.

“It is Mrs. Rochester.”

“Dear me, I might have known. A woman whom to know is to—to—”

“Avoid,” said Mrs. Netley. “Lord Pompey,” she added sternly, “we had better go; you dine with me to-night.”

“Gad, so I do,” he said brightening, remarking *sotto voce*, “Best cook in London; delightful woman, but severe.”

It was seven o’clock. Singly and in groups the guests had retired, all but Ulic Tarbert. When the hostess had said farewell to the last visitor, it was with an air of constraint she turned from the door and advanced to where he was standing by the chimney-piece. Neither spoke. He nervously changed his position, glancing at her in search of encouragement to speak the words filling his mind. Meanwhile she seated herself on a sofa near him, assuming a calmness she by no means felt.

“I have something to say which must be spoken, and yet I know not how to begin,” he said.

“Why,” she answered gently, “why say it—to-day?”

“Because I must know my fate; I cannot longer bear the suspense which weights me.”

“There are some,” she said sadly, “who must endure.”

“I am not one of these. We have been friends for years——”

“Why disturb our friendship?” she asked, anxious to interrupt him.

“Because it does not satisfy me; because I love you, and would win you for my wife.”



She made no answer, but leaning her elbows on her knees, buried her face in her hands. He watched a little sapphire fastened to her dress, rising and falling rapidly with the motions of her breast, and wondered if its changing lights and shifting sparkles typified the thoughts and fears, hopes and fancies passing through her mind.

"I know," he said, "I am not clever like many other men who surround you, but my love for you is as deep and strong as man's can be."

She raised her pale face, and looked into his eyes confidently, gratefully. "I don't doubt it," she said calmly, "it is not that."

"Then you believe me—perhaps—perhaps love me; and oh, if you do, why should we part?"

"We must," she said quietly, the words falling coldly, sadly from her lips.

"You don't love——"

"Oh," she cried out in agony, "ask me no more questions."

"But," he said, choking down his emotion, "I have some right to ask; only say yes or no and I shall be satisfied. Do you love me?"

The look in her dark eyes would have answered any man who was not a lover; but he waited for her words, and she loved him for his cruelty.

"I love you," she said, in a voice so sweet that it seemed heaven had opened and angel songs were heard on earth. He stepped forward hastily, and sat beside her, but she rose instantly, blushing and confused.

He was stunned and disappointed.

"We cannot be more than friends," she said. There was no longer music in her tones.

"I see," he replied bitterly, "you sacrifice affection to ambition. I have not made a name it is true——"

He paused, silenced by her reproachful look.



"Can you," she asked, "think so badly of me, can you imagine I would weigh things so poor and paltry as wealth or fame against the affection of an honest heart—the highest treasure a woman can gain? If so, you don't understand me. A name brings with it no happiness, and little satisfaction save that which lies in vanity; but love fills the world with joy. If I could freely love and were well loved in return, I should be content though steeped in poverty and sunk in obscurity. You have yet to learn the secrets of a woman's heart; nothing on earth satisfies her but love; nothing compensates for its loss."

He heard her with mingled feelings of delight and pain. She had declared she loved him, and yet that they could be no more than friends. He stood up, and, approaching her, gravely looked into her lustrous eyes, and said with a voice full of emotion, "Will you not be my wife—if not now, at least in the future? Don't," he continued pleadingly, "don't banish all hope."

"You know so little of me," she answered evasively.

"But that little has taught me to love you much."

"And you would marry me, though my past is to you a mere blank?"

"It is a poor love that has no trust. I know you can have done no wrong; I care not for aught if I am certain of one thing."

"And that?" she asked breathlessly.

"Your love."

A look of rapture came into her face, brightening every lineament, glowing in her eyes, transfiguring her whole being.

"You have not answered my question," he said, and all the light fled from her and left her in shadow.

"Ask me no more to-night," she replied hurriedly, anxiously. "Rest satisfied with what I have confessed,



and leave me—leave me now if you love me.” Her eyes turned towards a little clock on the chimney-piece which just then chimed the half-hour.

“When am I to have my answer?” he pleaded.

“If you will have it, to-morrow night. You are going to the Keans’, so am I; you shall have it then.” She spoke with nervous rapidity, and as she ended, held out her hand to signify their interview was at an end. He took it in both his own, then kissed it fervently.

As he left the drawing-room, the street door bell rang loud and clear; and as he descended the stairs, he saw the tall majestic figure of Benoni enter the house without question or hesitation. Meeting Tarbert, he bowed gravely and passed onwards in silence. Ulic, bewildered by a thousand thoughts, hesitated until meeting the surprised look of the servant waiting to show him out. As the hall door closed behind him, a weight seemed to have fallen on his heart.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### BENONI'S PROMISE.

THE passage of time brought neither peace nor contentment to Philip Amerton, who was now heartsick and weary. Strenuously he sought to conceal his disappointment and despair from his wife; a task in which he succeeded without much difficulty, as neither were her perceptions keen nor her sensibilities acute. The placid character of her mind was still undisturbed. The change in her life from girlhood to wifeness had not yet palled through familiarity; the excitement of travel and change still occupied her mind; the con-



sideration of re-entering society as the wife of a distinguished man filled her with anticipated triumph.

The metallic brightness of her character, which had formerly attracted Amerton because of its diversity to his own, now became a source of weariness and vexation, which required careful schooling to conceal and control. He was loth even when compelled, to admit her vivacity was insipidity, her tenderness passion. He wondered if years would deepen her nature, intensify her perceptions, ennoble her feelings. The glare of life was to her the perfection of enjoyment, to him the acme of horror.

More than ever he lived as a stranger in the centre of crowds; an unadhesive unit in the midst of assemblies. Mentally withdrawing from contact with the world into his own heart, he remained a solitary earnest man, moving amidst a populace of prattlers, with whose interests, appetites, greed of enrichment, desires of advancement he had nothing in common; mixing with a society of well-trimmed, smock-faced, wooden-hearted puppets powerless to feel or know, helpless to rise or move save in response to the motions of the master-manager—Fashion.

If he could but undo the past, if he could but rise free from the care with which he had weighted his days—that heaviest burden life can know, forced companionship with an unsympathetic mind. To endow his wife with a soul was, he feared, impossible; could he put back his own nature to a level with hers, and so find peace and happiness in a common condition of a lower plane? A sea of black thoughts surged in upon his soul. Then came remembrance of Benoni as a beacon light.

He had said in Florence they should meet some weeks hence; and Amerton, in the course of the afternoon on which he had seen Ulic Tarbert, set out to



seek the mystic. He would understand him; his presence brought peace; his words had healing balm in their significance. Amerton found him at home.

"Peace be with you," said the magian.

"And yet," answered Philip, "I know no peace."

Benoni laid one hand on his friend's shoulder and gazed sadly into his face.

"None," he said slowly and impressively—"none can the writing of destiny efface."

"What is it you mean?" asked Philip.

"That the old struggle for a higher life continues to sway your being. Your marriage has been powerless to bind your mind to this lower earth."

"Then," said Amerton, with hope fluttering wildly in his heart, "you assure me my marriage does not prove an impassable barrier to the state I once dreamt of attaining?"

"A barrier certainly, but not impassable. If we recede one step on the path, it will take two to make progress from our original position."

"So long as the steps can be taken, I care not."

"From your marriage," continued the mystic, "will proceed events that rightly understood, will further you on your way."

Amerton remained silent some minutes, his mind dwelling on the words he had heard, his pulse throbbing with strong desire.

"Speak to me no more," he said, "in phrases I cannot follow, but regard me from this hour as your pupil; let me hear from you the teachings of a master to his disciple."

"Patience, patience, patience," replied Benoni.

"When is my initiation to take place?" Philip asked.

The mystic raised one hand to indicate silence, and then with closed eyes and an absorbed air, seemed listening with keen attention. After a while he slowly opened



his eyes and said, "On the midnight of the seventh day from this, come here and you shall behold my master, Amuni. He will talk with you of your desires."

"Then he is in England?"

"No, he is in Thibet."

"He cannot arrive here in seven days."

"His astral form, with all the powers and sensations of his natural body, can be projected in a second."

Amerton remembered Benoni's appearance in Florence, concerning which he had never been able to satisfy himself. An uncanny sensation crept over him.

"Surely," he said, "this is against all the laws of nature."

The mystic regarded him compassionately.

"My friend," he answered, "have you such full knowledge of the laws of nature that you can say what is against and what is in harmony with them? Nay, can you, or those who babble vain-gloriously of science—who exerting their petty mental stature to highest limits, would stretch forward to measure Infinity by plummet, tape line, compass, or some such means of their paltry devising—tell me first what Nature is, whence came she, wherefore she exists? Think you science has knowledge of Nature's mighty secrets; has tabulated, explained, alphabetically arranged them for use of classes, and published them in popular editions for the benefit of board schools? The boast of modern science is but the trumpeting of egotism. Men lay claim to knowledge of the origin of all things in the heavens above and the earth below. Can they make known to me how came such colours on a peacock's tail?"

Amerton felt as if he had been reproached.

"Tell me," he asked, "who is Amuni?"

"He is the master under whom I have studied for long years. In the body he never leaves the regions of the Himalayan hills. He has survived many centuries.



He has trodden the rugged pathway of pain ; led the purified life ; and crossed the bridge parting mankind from spiritual knowledge. He has outlived sorrow and triumphed above humanity. Neither can grief overshadow or yearning disturb him, but wisdom abides with and peace crowns him for evermore."

"And his powers?" queried Amerton.

"Are manifold. He can transport his astral form where he desires, rendering it visible or invisible at will. He can control the elements, and make the countless messengers of air obedient to his behests. He can perceive the thoughts of those with whom he comes in to spiritual contact, though divided from them by lands and seas. His knowledge ranges over worlds unknown to inhabitants of this globe."

"You referred to the messengers of air; who are they?"

Benoni did not immediately reply.

"You have spoken of a subject," he said after some time, "concerning which intelligence is never given, save to those who have begun to tread the upward path. But yet I shall answer your question. Every schoolboy knows that a glass of water, clear to sight and pure to taste, swarms with life invisible to the naked eye; but few men are aware our atmosphere throbs with organisms unseen save to those whose eyes have been opened to other worlds. These inhabitants of our atmosphere, belief in whom has been common to all countries and times, are the twelve legions of angels of Scriptural phrase, the dryads, naiads and satyrs of classic ages, the genii of Eastern legend, the incubi and succubi of Pagan belief, the sirens of poets' tales, the elves and fairies popular in the folklore of every land. To us they are known as elementals. Their position is intermediary between mankind and spirits; their habitation is in a kingdom unknown to science, but spoken of by Homer



as 'the middle air.' As the vegetable and mineral kingdoms are divided and classified, so is this. There are superior and inferior powers; the malignant tribes who are permitted to wreck havoc on cities, by plague and storm, flood and fire; and bands who carry fruitfulness, peace and prosperity in their train. The former lure men to deeds of darkness, overwhelm them with despair, tempt them to suicide and destruction; the latter prompt them to noble acts and beneficent deeds, cheer them in their labours, console them in their sorrows."

"Then how may a man avoid the one and woo the other?"

"That rests with himself. The laws of sympathy and attraction underlie all nature; like draws unto like, Men who aim at self-elevation are attended by helpful elementals; those who tread the downward path are surrounded by evil tribes. These creatures, who are neither of the nature of man nor the essence of spirits, yet are half-human, half-ethereal, enjoy the passions to which they tempt through the senses of their victims; and for this reason have they hurried men onwards to shame and madness."

"But you have called them messengers of air."

"Yes; they it is who in some cases convey to us knowledge of occurrences in distant localities, transfer material objects from place to place irrespective of such barriers as walls or gates, bring to light objects hidden in the sea or buried in the earth, sometimes by their own power, frequently through the instrumentality of men. Being immaterial they are capable of penetrating and passing through all solids, and in motion are rapid as thought itself. To render them obedient to will and serviceable to purpose is one of the greatest mysteries occult lore holds, the possession of which, powerful as it is for good or evil, is confided only to



those who by a series of trying ordeals have proved themselves absolutely worthy of trust. This power is yielded by occult knowledge and indomitable will, and is no more marvellous than most scientific truths were before their secrets became generally known to mankind."

"And yet," says Philip, "it seems miraculous."

"A hundred miracles occur before our eyes in the passage of as many days. Light and darkness appear and disappear; storms gather, winds rage, lightning flashes, spring covers the land with green as with a royal mantle, heat succeeds cold, but yet we heed not such wonders because of their familiarity. It is only a new phenomenon that astonishes, an unexpected occurrence that startles, though it be less miraculous than causes and events we witness daily."

Amerton heard him in silence. His heart was as a lyre on which Benoni's utterances woke weird and mystic melodies, wordless, yet freighted with notes of strange import rousing the longings of his soul to new life and fresh vigour.

"Will such powers be given to me?" he asked.

"Certainly, if you prove yourself worthy of their reception."

"I am ready to endure any trial; put me to the test."

"Your hour of ordeal has not yet arrived. Before much is given you much is required. If you would govern others, you must first conquer self; only when an adept is dead to all emotions can he wield the passions of others as instruments of his will; not until he is indifferent to worldly interests can he exercise supreme influence over materialistic things. Did he dare to utilize the power he possessed for the satisfaction of his passions or the benefit of his greed, he would lose control over those he had bidden to execute



his commands, who, vengeful because of the services into which they were pressed, would hurry him forward through a wilderness of madness, and hurl him down the black abyss of death."

They were both silent awhile. Then Benoni continued, "On the midnight of the seventh day from this come to me. From the going down of the sun neither shall you eat nor drink on that day; purify your body by ablutions; seek the peaceful silence of your heart, that the words of Amuni the Faithful One may fall with gladness on your ears."

It was almost dinner-hour when Amerton reached his home in Campden Hill Road. The mystic's words were still ringing in his ears; the hopes they had begotten filled his mind. Impatient of the present he looked forward to the future, when the veil might be lifted and the mysteries of life now perplexing him should be made clear to his sight.

As he passed the drawing-room tired, pale, and anxious, his wife came to the door looking radiant, healthful, smiling, already dressed for dinner.

"I was afraid you would have been late, Philip," she said, "and you know I wish to dine early, as we afterwards go to the Keans'."

She turned back into the room; following her, he flung himself wearily on a sofa.

"I had forgotten all about the engagement," he said in an absent-minded way.

"How could you?" she asked reproachfully, as she advanced to a mirror and arranged some baubles on her breast; "you know I looked forward to it with pleasure."

"Yes, but I have come to hate crowds, above all society crowds, where a lot of inane people distract you by foolish grimaces, and plague you with feeble chatter."



"You must take the world as it is," she answered, her round blue eyes regarding him with wonder.

"I don't see why we must. I intend to avoid it in future."

"It wouldn't do for every man to turn hermit."

"Nor for every woman to gain sense, I suppose."

She turned from the reflection of her face to a neighbouring window and gazed on vacancy.

"I suppose every one who attends a social gathering is a fool in your eyes?"

"Almost," he answered. "The fact is, Miriam," he added, fearful their conversation might develop into one of those unpleasant discussions which recent experience taught him were not uncommon to married life, "I'm extremely tired to-night, and would rather not go, if you will excuse me."

"And am I to stay at home?" she demanded, turning from the window with a look in her eyes which threatened a storm.

"By no means, if you will not mind going alone; you can tell John to have the brougham waiting for your return at whatever hour you please." She gave a sigh of relief, yet felt pained by his unwillingness to accompany her. Another man in his place would have been proud to see the world admire her; have rejoiced in her triumphs, felt flattered by the homage she received. But he was indifferent to her social success; had no desire of helping her towards distinction as a woman of fashion, or aiding her in posing as the wife of a well-known man. And yet they had not been twelve months married. Was it wise after all to have wedded a genius? Why was he not satisfied to dwell amongst his fellows instead of trying to soar into the clouds?

"People will wonder why you are not with me," she said presently.



"Never mind what people think," he answered; "it is a mistake to take their thoughts into consideration."

"They may say we have quarrelled already, or that you don't love me."

"But their sayings will make no difference to you or to me, dear—cannot influence our feelings towards each other."

"No, but——"

"But what?"

"I do wish you would come, Philip," she said, laying one hand on his shoulder. He took it and kissed it affectionately. His action reminded both of the first months of their married life, and the distance which they had drifted apart since then was bridged in a second.

"I'll go if you like," he said, with a ring of the old feeling in his voice.

"No, not if you don't wish it," she said, for having gained her point, woman-like, she became generous.

"Then I'll stay at home," he answered with relief.

"Very well," she said, with some disappointment, sorry now she had spoken so quickly. "I suppose we had better have dinner at once," she continued, turning away.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### HOPES AND FEARS.

SIR RICHARD KEAN was a power in the Cabinet; Lady Kean a star in the firmament of fashion; both were wealthy, ambitious, hospitable, for which reasons they entertained the world at large. And as each bade to their feasts members of the circle in which he or she moved, it came to pass their house was known as a



platform on which all manner of men and women met amicably. Within its spacious walls Irish members jostled the House of Peers, courtiers became comrades of players, fashion and letters rubbed shoulders and were friends, the lamb sat down to dinner with the wolf, and all were glad.

Some hours after Mrs. Amerton's conversation with her husband, Lady Kean's rooms were crowded. The murmur of hundreds of voices rose like sounds of the sea. Seated on a landing commanding an excellent view of the principal rooms, Mrs. Rochester watched Colonel Tarbert eagerly, closely. His heavy brows were contracted, his eyes wandered searchingly from face to face. At last they encountered Mrs. Rochester, who beckoned him towards her with her fan, and made room for him beside her. They were old friends.

"You have been looking," she said laughingly, "for an angel."

"And I find a——"

"Devil," she suggested good-humouredly.

"Woman, I was about to say."

"You would find her a more suitable companion."

"Can't say; I never met an angel."

"Not even one?" she asked mischievously.

"Unless yourself," he answered with a sneer.

"Your compliments are as pleasant as they are sincere," she said airily, as if in her merriest mood, and not resentful of his impertinence. She looked over her shoulder to see if those near were engaged in conversation, and then demanded:

"Are you engaged to-morrow night?"

"Not particularly; why?"

"Then ask me to dine at the Grand, and take me to a theatre afterwards—for the sake of old times," she added in a lower key, her eyes watching the effect of her words.



"Sentiment was never your *forte*," he replied, looking at her coldly.

She laughed undismayed. "I am sad," she said, and need amusing."

"You mean you are in debt," he replied, "and want money."

"If you put it in that forcible manner y—es," she replied frankly.

"Where is your loyal knight, the little lordling?"

"His father, the Duke of Bloomsbury, has refused to give him another penny, and has recalled him to the country. Poor lad, he would play *écarté* the last night he was in town."

"Of course he would; and you weren't sufficiently hard-hearted to refuse joining in the game."

"Exactly."

"How much did you win?" he inquired.

"He insisted on giving me a bill for three hundred pounds, payable next month."

Colonel Tarbert laughed unpleasantly. "Poor fool," he remarked contemptuously.

"Come," said Mrs. Rochester, "if you invite me to dinner to-morrow night and get this bill cashed for me, I shall do you a good turn next week, believe me."

"What do you mean?"

"That I shall ask Mrs. Philip Amerton to dinner, and you to meet her."

"You will have to invite him also."

"Her husband—of course; but I'm told he seldom goes out with her. I suppose they are tired to death of each other."

"All right," replied the colonel, his heavy grey eyes brightening. "I'll expect you to dine with me to-morrow night at seven."

"At the Grand?"

"Yes."



"And you will have the money ready for me? Here is the bill. I know you can get it cashed if you like; there is no risk. Oblige an old friend."

"Well, I'll see about it."

"Remember, no cash, no banquet."

"Who else do you intend asking?"

"Only a new friend of mine, the heir of a tallow merchant, a youth fresh from Oxford, with plenty of money and a taste for good society."

"In which you indulge him."

"Don't be severe."

"Not for the world. You are an angel."

"And not a devil?"

"That is best known to yourself," he answered as he rose and walked towards the great drawing-room.

Soon after this conversation ended, Ulic Tarbert entered the house. His honest blue eyes were clouded by sorrow, his frank fair face shadowed with doubt. He had come here to receive an answer which must end the suspense tearing his heart; must make him the happiest or most miserable of mankind. The fact that Gal Alex had admitted her love warmed his heart; but yet her hesitation to accept his offer filled him with despair. He could not believe her tardiness to relieve his suspense arose from indecision, yet he was loth to believe she awaited Benoni's counsel regarding her choice. All his dread of disappointment and vague apprehensions of grief centred themselves round the mystic. He remembered how she had shrunk from him at Mrs. Netley's; how Benoni had sought her in the alcove, had given her the flower. And though occasionally tempted to believe some secret kept her in his power, yet Ulic banished the thought as injurious to her and unworthy of himself.

All his future welfare, his chance of happiness, depended on making Gal Alex his wife. Shared with



her, existence stretched to its fullest length of days, would become a period of too brief bliss; without her he dared not think of his coming years. How terrible that the decision of another being should weigh so heavily for happiness or misery in the balance of a life.

Abstracted because of the tumult of his thoughts, pale from force of his feelings, he wandered through the rooms in search of the woman's face which had become the load-star of his existence. The ever-shifting crowd dazzled and confused him. Occasionally his course was checked by friends or acquaintances, who detained him to narrate some gossip or anecdote which conveyed little sense to his pre-occupied mind. After wandering to and fro for some time without seeing Gal Alex, he concluded she had not yet arrived. As he was about to quit a smaller drawing-room he felt a light touch on his arm, and turning round quickly, saw Mrs. Amerton talking to his cousin, Colonel Tarbert. They were standing somewhat apart from the crowd, and Ulic noticed her eyes flashed and a deep colour suffused her cheeks. She held out her hand.

"I haven't seen you since my return," she said in quick, nervous tones.

"I waited until you were quite settled before I called."

"Will you take me to the refreshment-room and get me an ice?" she asked.

Without waiting for an answer she took his arm, and bowing to the colonel, left him with an expression of grim disappointment on his heavy face.

Whilst they were in the room she did not speak to Ulic, but on gaining the landing she addressed him:

"I don't want an ice, thank you—that is, I have changed my mind. But, Mr. Tarbert, will you do me a favour? Philip is not here to-night, he couldn't come, and I ordered the brougham for twelve o'clock;



it won't be here for another hour—will you take me home? I—I must go. I don't feel well," she said, placing her hand upon her heart; "take me away."

For a moment he thought of pleading an engagement, but he could not refuse her request, and he considered he might be able to drive her home and return before Gal Alex left.

Accepting silence as compliance, Mrs. Amerton led him towards the cloak-room, and presently they were driving towards Campden Hill Road. Occupied with her thoughts, she did not speak, and her companion being likewise engaged, the journey was made in silence. As they drove into High Street, Kensington, Ulic, reproaching himself for his lack of sympathy, asked if she were better.

"Better," she repeated, as if the question surprised her; then added quickly, "Oh yes, much better thanks. Good-night, and thank you so much. You will soon come and see us, I hope."

He assisted her out of the cab, saw her enter the house, then directing the cabdriver to take him back quickly, was on his way to the Keans' again. Entering the drawing-room, he saw Gal Alex standing alone and looking towards the door, as if expecting him. He went up at once to her, and they shook hands in silence. She then asked him to fetch her a light wrap she had left in the cloak-room, and when he had obeyed, she said, "Let us go into the garden; the cool and shade will be a grateful change."

Escaping from the crowded rooms into the night, they found the atmosphere refreshing and balmy, the sky clear and bright with stars. Here and there outlines of figures passing under trees lighted by coloured lamps were visible; voices and faint peals of laughter now and then rang from the darkness beyond. Ulic had given his arm to his companion, and led her to a



pathway almost deserted. Neither spoke. The influence of this calm night, with its mystic stars and fragrant odours, was upon him. Heedless of discordant voices near, and mindful only of the presence beside him, he thought, whatever the future might hold, the memory of this hour must abide with him for ever.

He was loth to disturb the peace which, spell-like, hung around him; perhaps this was the last hour of happiness his life might know, and yet he could not wholly enjoy it because of the terrible eagerness besetting him to learn his impending fate.

At last he said in a low, uncertain voice :

"Tell me, tell me, dear, you will become my wife?"

The hand laid upon his arm twitched nervously.

"Would you," she asked, "repeat the words you spoke yesterday?"

"You know I would."

"Don't you think," she continued in tones strangely unlike her own, "when a man gives his heart to a woman he hands his sword to an enemy?"

"For God's sake don't jest with me," he cried out; "I can't bear it now."

"Forgive me," she said, a sob rising in her throat, and presently Ulic felt a warm drop fall upon his hand.

He put his arm around her, bent down his head, and would have kissed her but she drew back.

"You will be my wife?" he said; but as he spoke his heart sank from fear.

"No," she answered, almost in a whisper, "I cannot, I cannot."

She could say no more because of the tears choking her voice.

"You cannot," he repeated, feeling he did not quite understand her words; "and but a few hours since you owned you loved me."



"Yes, but it was——"

"Not false?" he interrupted, feeling as if earth trembled in the balance of her words; "don't say 'twas false."

"No, not false, but 'twas wrong."

"But you love me?" he asked, forgetful for a second of all else save the happiness her assurance would convey.

"Love you," she replied softly, "but too well."

"Then," he said, still refusing to banish hope, "what prevents you from being my wife?"

She did not speak immediately; a great struggle swayed her mind; he could feel her trembling. "I cannot tell you here nor now," she answered, "but some day soon you shall hear my story and understand all."

The sound of laughter far down the garden, the notes of a merry song floating from the house, fell upon their ears discordantly.

"If you have suffered wrongs in the past," he said, "you have but greater claim on my love; let my affection efface the memory of your sorrow; my whole life shall be devoted to your care."

His words fell upon her ears with a sweetness such as music never yet conveyed. She thought of them long afterwards, and in days of depression and nights of pain they rose from the silence of her heart and solaced its weariness. She dared not venture to reply, but pressed his arm in token he was understood in all.

"You will always be dear to me," she found voice to say presently, "and I shall never forget you, but we can be no more than friends. And now," she added hurriedly, fearing his answer, "see me to my carriage. I cannot re-enter the rooms with red eyes; my hostess will not remember I haven't bidden her good-bye."

"When am I to see you again?" he asked. Until



he had heard her story he would not admit his cause was lost.

“In a few days. Don’t come until I write to you.”

She put the wrap covering her shoulders over her head, and still leaning on his arm, walked through a long passage leading from the garden to the entrance door. Once she glanced at Ulic, and his white face and sad eyes smote her to the heart.

As her brougham drove from the door she covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud as if her heart would break. Suddenly the carriage, owing to some cabs blocking the thoroughfare, stopped with a jerk that almost flung her to the opposite seat. She leaned forward to ascertain the cause; as she did a man’s face was thrust against the window. The lamp-light flashing on his features, revealed them distinctly to her sight; her eyes met those bent upon her malignantly, and uttering a cry, she crouched back into shadow. When she looked again the face had vanished.

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## CHAPTER X.

### AMUNI THE FAITHFUL ONE.

THE day appointed for Philip Amerton’s interview with Amuni arrived. The feverish eagerness with which he awaited its approach had now vanished, leaving him abstracted, weary and depressed. From morning until night the sky had been overcast, the atmosphere was warm and humid; no sunshine had pierced the grey mass of drifting cloud, rain had fallen heavily from time to time.

All day long Philip had sat alone in his study, not working but thinking. Problems which of old had



frequently beset him rose up once more, confronted, questioned, perplexed him, demanded answers. What was this strange combination of spirit and matter, action and desire, aspirations and grovellings, this mystery of all ages called man? Was he merely an animal whose highest happiness was bounded by appetites, sensations, passions; or was his form but the outward covering of an intangible essence called soul, clothing itself in mortality at birth, regaining invisibility and freedom at death? Did the liberated spirit awaken to living realities on quitting the outworn garment wrought of flesh and sinew, or become a mere phantom in a world of shadows, or returning again to earth enveloped in another body, work out its mission in obedience to a higher law? From whence have men started and to where do they tend? Surely not to nothingness. Decease cannot destroy but merely change the soul's condition. Verily the past was something more than a mighty burial vault, drear as death, silent as time, darker than night.

He raised his eyes, fraught with sadness, upwards, but clouds, restless and sombre as his thoughts, shut out all light.

Was man's life but as a breath? Was heaven above, with its glorious sun, its limitless dome crowded with stars, wondrous, mysterious, innumerable; its powerful winds that swept the world and lashed vast seas to madness; its moon that lulled them into calm; was the earth with its teeming fruitfulness and uncounted treasures, mighty mountains and wide plains, all made that man might enjoy them but for a brief space. Was he as a traveller resting for a night at a wayside inn, to journey at dawn towards strange lands he knows not of but seeks? Did the human race, generation after generation, march in an unending procession from the hill-top of life down weary roadways of years



into the valley of shadow and death to exist no more? Men had come without consent or option into light and consciousness, and passed away without will or choice into silence and darkness, as ships that rise and sink upon the horizon and leave no trace upon the sea. He rose wearily and walked backwards and forwards impatient, restless, weighed with sadness.

Why did he seek to solve the mysteries of creation; the motives of man's entrance into and exit from the world; the strange secrets of promptings, inclinations, loves, hatreds, passions, hopes and fears that filled humanity's heart? His very earnestness placed him at odds with his kind. Why could not he eat, drink and make merry, careless if his life went out with tomorrow's sun?

When the dinner-bell had rung he descended, to find his wife dressed and beaming with anticipated pleasure. She was going to a theatre in company with Mrs. Rochester, and paid no heed to his pale face and haggard looks, but rattled on concerning the play and players she was about to see. He sat at the table, but neither ate or drank. Neither had he the desire nor spirits to answer his wife's remarks; but she, as if anxious silence should not exist on this occasion, spoke volubly concerning he knew not what. When she had finished dinner he rose with relief and went back to his study, from whence he heard the roll of the carriage which bore her in search of pleasure.

How terribly alone in life he seemed. It was pitiful that the woman whom of all others he had selected as his wife was unable to approach him in that inner world of thoughts and feelings where he continually dwelt. Must he for ever exist a solitary man? Without admitting the fact to himself, he was yet aware his affections were flung upon barren ground choking their infinite possibilities. To what depths they might have



taken root, to what heights they might have grown, nourishing and beautifying life if given to more congenial soil, he dared not think.

It was almost midnight when he left his home, rain was falling steadily, a cold wind blew in his face. Wrapping his inverness around him and pulling his hat over his eyes, he strode forward rapidly, resolved he would walk to his destination, and by bodily exertion allay if possible the tumult of thoughts whirling through his brain.

Entering High Street, Kensington, he found that thoroughfare almost deserted, the flagway glittered with wet, reflecting the yellow light of dim lamps; the only sounds reaching his ears were the cries of cab-drivers anxious to secure fares, and the chiming of clocks, whose sounds, muffled by the heavy atmosphere, fell like sad funereal music on his ears. Stars were blotted from the sky; one dense pall-like cloud spread above the silent city; nature was in her saddest mood. On such a night might troubled lives seek quick extinction in black and whirling tides; might murder grapple with its victims and hide its blood-reeking hands in unfathomable darkness! might fiends perpetrate nameless deeds; might madness scream unheard by pitiless heaven, and ghostly visitants haunt the homes of men.

As Philip walked rapidly onwards—the night wind flitting past him voiceful with the wail of lost souls—his heart sunk, weighted by fears he dared not analyse. Pursuing his dreary way he entered old Kensington Road; scarce a footfall sounded on his ears; the roll of wheels, heard for a moment, was quickly lost in lengthening distance; the houses on either side were dark and silent.

One home he passed whose well-lighted windows pierced the blackness. From within came notes of



lively music, sounds of merry voices, and the quick patter of feet. Looking up, he saw the figures of dancers pass and repass, floating before his sight against a brilliant background; but in a moment he had left this vision behind, and was again alone with darkness.

At last he paused before a square-built, desolate-looking house isolated from its neighbours and surrounded by a forlorn garden in which poplar trees, tall, shadowy, and gaunt, rose like churchyard phantoms. Lying far back from the highway as if shrinking from human intercourse, the dwelling was separated from the footpath by high grey weather-beaten walls and a strong gate, rusty with age. Above this rose a pointed arch, composed of two iron bars. A ring, from which a lantern was wont to hang, was yet suspended from the centre, and at the sides were link extinguishers like inverted cornucopiæ corroded by lack of paint and long disuse. The sombre bearing of the house was intensified at such an hour as this; gloom dwelt within it; blackness covered it as with a shroud.

In answer to his touch, the loud peal of a bell rang through the night, and, ceasing by slow degrees, marked the silence by contrast of its sound. No light became visible; the windows seen above the high grey walls stared blankly into space like sightless eyes; no movement was heard from within. Raindrops fell from the poplar trees upon the black earth like tears upon a coffin-lid. The sound of ivy leaves shivering on the wall seemed as the rustling of cerements. Amerton's heart sunk. Was this most melancholy mood of nature sent as a mute warning against the step he was about to take? Did the elements sorrow over his self-selected fate? Impressionable to all influences, the night had communicated its trouble to his soul. Yet no definite



thought of swerving from his resolution entered his mind.

Once more he rang the bell, and now his summons was answered. The house-door opened, footsteps were heard on the flagged pathway of the desolate garden, a key turned slowly in a lock, and the gate was swung open. Then from out the darkness came Benoni's voice:

"Peace be on you."

Amerton entered without response, the gate closed behind him, and Benoni in silence preceded him to the house. In the long marble-paved hall, dark save for the light of a flickering lamp and chilling in its coldness, Philip removed his hat and coat, and still following his host, crossed a passage to the left, when they arrived at a heavy oak door. Here Benoni paused a moment, raised the lamp above his visitor's head, and calmly surveyed his pale anxious face. A look of mingled tenderness and compassion rested in the mystic's eyes, he opened his lips as if to speak, then hesitated and remained silent. Flinging open the door, he ascended a narrow winding stair leading to an octagon-shaped apartment, which had been built for and used as an observatory.

Lofty in height and spacious in size, it was surmounted by a glass dome, from which hung a curiously wrought bronze lamp, that, leaving the upper part of the room in shadow, cast a soft mellow light below. The walls were hung with purple silk wrought in threads of gold with phrases in Eastern tongues, cabalistic figures, and mystic symbols. At the north end stood a tripod supporting a vessel in which yellow flames burned, diffusing heat and fragrance; before a closed shrine a violet-coloured lamp flickered. The floor was covered with skins of beasts; a massive folio, bound in vellum and fastened with strong clasps, lay



upon an altar of white marble, behind which hung an oval mirror; a great crystal was placed upon a stand, the legs of which represented coiled bodies of serpents; charts of the heavens were spread on a desk close by; velvet couches lined the walls.

The room and its belongings seemed strangely familiar to Amerton. Though he had never set his foot within it, he was distinctly conscious of having seen it before, of noting its furniture, feeling its warmth, inhaling its fragrant atmosphere.

"Yes," replied Benoni, answering his thoughts, "you have been here before, not in the flesh but in the spirit."

"Have you beheld me?"

"Plainly as I see you now," replied the mystic.

"Did you summon me here?"

"No, my friend. When your body was cast into deep sleep, your spirit escaping from its prison-house, rushed forward on the wings of desire, seeking here the knowledge for which it hungers and thirsts. Your spirit it is which, affording you no peace until fully satisfied, has brought you here to-night. The things of earth cannot gratify your nature for long. Union with a beautiful woman, wealth sufficient for your desires, a name distinguished amongst men, friends in abundance are yours, and yet beyond these is something higher which you desire."

"What you say is even true," replied Amerton. "And yet times there were when I have been indifferent to the acquirement of higher knowledge, when the fascination all things mystic held for me vanished; but soon the troubled longing to penetrate the secrets of a world on the border-land of which I stood returned with increased strength."

"Do you not know," replied Benoni, "that in many persons divers inclinations and contradictory feelings



are centred? These are oftentimes the jarring remnants of past existences warring with the present life. You are the outcome of ages. Not your body, which in a few seconds can be rendered inanimate, and before the sun rises reduced to ashes; but your spirit, which has previously inhabited many bodies and bears some trace of each dwelling. That you have no distinct remembrance of former existences is due to the sleep-like rest which for certain periods follows bodily demise; but the experiences of your past lives rest with your spirit."

"Why does it return?"

"The All Merciful sends it back, that by good deeds it may work its way upwards to eternal rest, which is bliss. At present your soul has reached a point where it triumphs above the contending influences of former lives; and only the possession of knowledge, the certainty of power will satisfy you henceforth."

"Then," said Amerton, "I have lived more lives than one."

"Yes; you have existed in many ages and in many countries. In your last incarnation you led a high but not the highest life; it was necessary you should come into the world again. The intuition and imagination which enable you, with little experience, to penetrate character and depict romance, is but accumulated observation stored in your consciousness ages ago."

Philip wondered much at what he heard. "Shall this be my last life?" he asked,

"That rests with yourself," replied the mystic, rising from where he sat and facing Amerton. "And now," he asked, "have you the courage to meet my master face to face?"

"I have," Philip answered resolutely.

It was not alone the wind wailing through the poplar



trees outside which caused him to shudder; a sudden numbness shot through his veins; it seemed as if the hand of death gripped his heart.

Benoni took off his slippers, and removing his velvet robe, clad himself in a garment of white linen that fell in many folds to his feet. Upon its hem were worked in silver threads the cabalistic signs of the nine orders of celestial angels; on its breast was a pentagram, around which were wrought the sacred names JHUH, ADNI, AHUH, AGLA; on its skirt were the four symbols of the cabala, with the names of the seven great archangels, Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Asrael, Samael, Zadkiel, and Oraphiel. On the right sleeve, raised in selenite, were the mystic letters A Z O T H, and on the left the word AGLA. Taking a rod of silver, set with crystals, he traced a circle on the floor and in the air, repeating many prayers the while; then filling a censer with burning sandal-wood from the tripod, he sprinkled it with powder, and instantly clouds arose whose perfume drenched the senses with delight. Censer in hand, he walked around the circle three times seven, repeating in low tones an incantation, musical and weird.

Amerton, beholding him in silence, saw that though without the circle all was obscure with incense smoke, yet within all was clear and bright as day. But even as he gazed the mellow radiance of the wrought lamp paled before a lustre whose source was unseen, which, like a column of moonlight reflected on an ocean, descended obliquely, illuminating the space within the circle with exceeding brilliancy. Outside its circumference all became dark as death, yet its blackness throbbed as if peopled with innumerable hosts of speechless phantoms, the stealthy movements of whose sinewless limbs Amerton fancied he could hear amidst the awful spell of soul-depressing silence.



Winds, cold as the air of charnel-houses, swept round him, stilling the coursing blood in his veins and freezing the marrow in his bones. Nameless, momentarily deepening terror descended upon him, of which he felt powerless to rid himself by act or will. He could see the figure of Benoni in his white robe standing within the circle, his eyes closed, his head bowed, his arms extended, his lips moving as if in prayer. And Philip, listening, heard him say: "O follower of Gautama, son of Mayadevi, who wears the heavens on his finger as a sapphire ring; who holds in his right hand the keys of the gates of Everlasting Light; thou Amuni, the Faithful One, who camest forth wise from the womb; whose days have outnumbered ages, who has conquered death; who hast begun to tread the sunlit road leading to Nîrvana; whose heart is a mine of wisdom; whose speech is as a gift of silver, vouchsafe to appear before one whose desire is to become thy pupil and thy servant, that the doubts of his mind may depart; deign to speak with him, for he with hope and joy thy words awaiteth."

He paused a moment, as if awaiting some desired sight or sound. The dense black atmosphere without the circle quivered with unseen life; faint whispers of inarticulate words fled past Amerton, who sat motionless, absorbed, and impatient from expectancy.

After awhile Benoni continued:

"O follower of Gautama, son of Mayadevi, the obviator of difficulties, the son of Exalted Fame, on whose two celestial feet the world is gazing; whose brow is resplendent of many moons; whose smile is more sweet than honey dropping from the comb; whose words are as the waters of life; whose lips disperse the sorrows of his servants; thou Amuni, the Faithful One, delight the sight of this neophyte with a vision of thy form; comfort his spirit with thy



wisdom-dropping speech ; strengthen with thy counsel his soul languid as the drooping wings of a tired dove. The firmament of his mind is obscured by clouds of doubt ; spread beams luminous with spiritual light across its darkness that his path may be clear. Let his heart be agitated by thy presence as waves of the deep are stirred by the lunar orb ; for his soul, consumed by a fever of longing to behold thy face, already floats toward thee on wings of desire. O Amuni, here thy servant's voice and be gracious to his prayer."

Scarce had his last words trembled into silence, when a stroke as if from a silver bell rang through the room ; and soon music, soft and subdued, rose and fell with delicious entrancement, until listening time stood still, lost in a tangle of sweet sounds. And as Amerton yet sitting in outward darkness, gazed into the luminous circle, he was conscious of the outline of a human figure standing in the light. Still staring in speechless awe, he saw the form gradually solidify, until there stood before him a man clad from head to foot in robes of white. His face was youthful and of exceeding beauty ; his figure tall and of majestic mien ; his eyes were as wells of light.

In obedience to a movement of his arm the outer darkness shrank back as night before dawn. And as the blackness vanished, so did all fear from Amerton's heart, and with a sense of confidence and happiness, he looked into the face of the strange being. The music gradually ceased.

The same feeling of mystery, a like soothing sensation he had ever experienced when he believed some invisible presence near, now took possession of him. He was no longer awed or depressed, but calmed inexpressibly, fortified with mental strength, and filled with hope.

Coming closer to him with noiseless footfall, Amuni



crossed his hands upon his breast in salutation, and in a voice sounding as from afar said :

“My son, though my form be strange to your sight, my presence is familiar to your spirit. Long have I known you, frequently have I stood by your side.”

“Then it was you,” cried Amerton, “whose breath in the darkness of night I have felt upon my cheek, whose touch in hours of quiet assured me I was not alone.”

“Even so,” replied Amuni.

“Then why have I not beheld you as I do now?”

“Because your spiritual sight was not opened.”

“And you have known me from youth upwards.”

“My knowledge of you extends through long ages before your present birth. In your last life, some hundreds of years ago, as men count time, you living in this country, were known to me as a student of occult lore. The world regarded you as an astrologer. The days upon which you had fallen were fraught with trouble for the land. Peering into the future, you had foretold the horrors of civil warfare, the violent death of your monarch, the exile and restoration of royalty. Many there were who believed, but more who ridiculed the science you professed. In your further search into the mysteries of life and death, into the vast secrets of nature, I was appointed your master.”

“Then have I learned knowledge from you?”

“Alas no,” answered Amuni. “Had your spirit been as brave as your desires were strong, you had crossed the bridge parting mortals from immortals, and entered the golden gates of that land where wisdom shines as sunlight on the sea, and darkness dwells not.”

“In what did I fail?”

“All students of occult lore must prove themselves worthy of the knowledge they seek. For every fresh revelation vouchsafed them new proof of moral strength



is required. If absolute power over nature were given to those unworthy of trust, to those careless of using its force for good of humanity or sufficiently frail to apply it for evil, then ruin and desolation would encompass the world, You, my son, were tried and found wanting. No second opportunity is given a student in a single life."

"Alas," Philip exclaimed, "how unhappy have I been!"

"In the fulness of time, death closed your bodily eyes. Even as consciousness is suspended in sleep to re-awake at dawn, so your spirit rested in the night-time of space to rise at the appointed hour and begin the new day of your present life. Because of the love I bore you in the past, I have striven to help you in your present incarnation."

"Master, friend," cried Amerton, extending his hands to grasp those of Amuni; but though he saw them meet those of the form before him, he was unconscious of touch. Involuntarily he shrank back.

Amuni smiled. "You see but the semblance of my body," he said, "which, now wrapped in trance, rests in a land far from here; this form you behold—like it in all things, possessing the same powers—is linked to its earthly counterpart by a vital chain, reuniting us at will."

"Those things you have spoken," said Amerton, "fill me with wonder, and account for much that heretofore perplexed me. In the recognition of strange places, familiarity with old-world events, acquirements of knowledge concerning things unstudied, consciousness of another existence has gleamed upon me, as lightning flashes revealing familiar landscapes to benighted travellers."

"Your spirit still retains its old yearning for mystic lore."



"Aye, helpless to restrain my cravings, I have desired knowledge with infinite longing. Tell me," he continued, "shall it be granted me in this life?"

A sigh, weighted by grief, escaped Amuni's lips, and his eyes were suddenly clouded by sorrow.

"It depends on yourself," he answered. "Others may carry grapes to our lips, we alone can taste of them."

"I am ready to undergo the necessary test," said Amerton, feeling the throbbing of new strength within him.

"My son," replied Amuni gravely, and with volumes of melancholy in his tones, "the path you would tread is fraught with darkness and danger. In your onward course temptation will assail, grief will attend, and humiliation lie down with you; for 'tis only when we have sown in pain and sorrow we may reap in peace and joy."

Amerton's head sank upon his breast for his heart was sorely troubled.

"Seek not knowledge higher than you already possess," said Amuni, "and your days will be filled with honour as a garden with flowers; your age crowned with peace as the hill-tops with snow. Thousands there are in this fair world of yours whose years are fraught with fear and pain, whose fate is barren hopes and broken hearts. These will be spared you if you seek not the higher path. But before your eyes behold the light of lore they must be washed with the brine of tears."

"My master," said the neophyte, "are mortals but the sport of fate, or are we most divinely ruled? In the tempest of thoughts whirling through my brain, I know not what to say, and only feel I must obey a will within me higher than my own; pain will seem as pleasure if it leads to the goal my soul seeks. Show



me the path to tread, and though sorrow clings to me and peace forsakes my heart, my feet shall be firm in the course they pursue, for I thirst for knowledge as parched grass for cooling rain, and long for repose as the hunted doe for rest."

"My son," replied Amuni, "you neither know the nature nor the extent of the ordeal you would embrace. Your heart must be withdrawn from the desires and attractions of the senses. Though you live in the world, all it holds dear must be rooted from your nature, aye, though your heart should bleed and your life lie in darkness. Not in the fleeting present but in the eternal future must you seek peace; earthly love must die in your heart, ambition hold no place in your mind. You must walk as a shadow amongst men, having no pleasure in aught they prize, no trust in those they honour, desiring only that lying beyond you. You must save your life by sacrificing it; gain through loss; die to live."

As Amerton listened, his soul was troubled anew, for he thought of the woman he had made his wife, the life he had taken to his own. But Amuni, as if reading his mind, replied:

"You have married a wife and tasted the sacred joys of the household existence, even as did Gautama. But he, conquering nature, parted from her he loved with boundless ardour that he might embrace the holier life. The natural must be overcome that the eternal may be gained. By his passions is man chained to earth; by self-conquest is he raised to heaven. Had you no knowledge of domestic love, your sacrifice would have missed its most poignant pang. The student of occultism must lead a celibate life."

"Alas," said Amerton, "I am tortured to distraction; my soul is rent in twain. How can I part from her whom I have sworn to cherish and protect?"



"There is no need for parting," replied Amuni; "know you not there is a love higher than that founded on the senses."

Then there fell upon the room a silence as of death; the young man wrestled with his soul. Thick drops of perspiration oozing from his face and the quick drawing of his breath betrayed strong struggle. The climax of his fate had arrived; on his decision now must rest his future life. Eventually urged by an inner force he was incapable of withstanding, he flung himself upon his knees before Amuni and said:

"Be my master, I shall obey in all things; give me but the light I desire."

After a pause Amuni spoke to him:

"Your course will consist of no set ordeal, of no special task. Trial by fire and flame is but symbolic of the test by passion and pain. As only when man has conquered death he really lives, so is it when inclinations are subdued the soul reigns. Events will occur in your daily life that will search your spirit and wrestle with your strength. Submit yourself to the will of the All Merciful, embrace the sorrows sent you, accept the lessons taught you, despise not the humiliations visited on you. When triumph crowns you, shall you behold me again."

With the index-figure of his right hand he pointed to a cross which two transverse lines had made on Amerton's left palm. When the latter raised his eyes from the sign, no trace of Amuni was visible. The great white light had vanished, the rays of the bronze lamp burned dim, and with arms wide stretched and face turned towards the east, Benoni knelt in prayer, his head bowed low the while.



## CHAPTER XI.

## THE STORY OF HER LIFE.

A FORTNIGHT after Ulic Tarbert had heard from Gal Alex the words which extinguished his hope, he received a brief note from her bidding him call in the afternoon. Since the night of the Keans' reception he had made no attempt to see her.

Young in years, quick to feel, impatient of pain, his disappointment deeply coloured his days. It seemed to him his future must remain a blank, that through all the years of his life he should be an observer of rather than a participator in joys common to humanity. Becoming suddenly weary of all that had previously given him pleasure, existence grew distasteful. Forgetful that the sphere in which each man lives, bounded by the narrow circumference of his own thoughts, feelings, experiences, is not the great world at large, he vaguely wondered why all things remained unchanged whilst his life had materially altered. He shrank from social crowds, avoided the companionship of his friends, worked harder than before, and passed most of his evenings alone, smoking and dreaming of what might have been, whilst day blended with night, and darkness, befitting the sombre complexion of his mind, crept across the world.

He had pondered continually over the words Gal Alex had spoken, wondering what was the mystery of her life, hoping he might be able to aid her in some way. Earnestly did he desire that circumstances would require him to make a great sacrifice for her sake. The days of knight errantry are over, but human nature remains ever the same, and he would gladly have engaged in combat and laid down his life for the lady of his heart.



Loving her exceedingly, doubt of her worth or honour never rose in his mind to impugn her fame or cool his ardour; for as fire and water, affection and suspicion have no common abiding-place. Sympathy for the sorrow clouding her increased his tenderness tenfold; for men love best natures which appeal to them most, so that in woman's weakness lies her strength.

He would have sought change by going out of town, but some fascination held him near her; and he regarded distraction from his thoughts as disloyalty to their object. Nor did he desire relief from his disappointment if likewise it lessened his attachment; he would not put love from him though it bore him sorrow, Through the potent power of this first affection all that was loyal and noble in his nature awoke; that which had lain dormant in his life became active, The influence of the feminine upon the male, exemplified in all the kingdoms of nature, finding uttermost expression in humanity, was here perceptible. This love had come to him as spring to the earth, apprising his heart of the wonderful possibilities it contained of happinesses yet unknown. And now, though he might not enjoy the fruits of summer, he would not endure the insensibility of winter.

It was morning when he received her note, and he impatiently awaited the hour at which he was bidden. The feelings and agitations crowded into this day would have sufficed for a year of his former existence. Counting time, not by calendar dates, but heart throbs, in the space of a few hours he lived a lifetime. But among the contending emotions which stirred him, hope was found wanting.

Arriving at Gal Alex's house he was shown into the study, a little room looking on a trim garden, with rose-trees climbing round the casements. In this apartment she worked through the brightest hours of day. The



walls were surrounded with bookshelves, on which her own novels, her favourite authors, and presentation copies of their works from contemporary writers were ranged like various companies of a common army.

On the topmost shelf stood terra cotta busts, framed photographs, china figures, Indian vases, and various objects of art. On the walls above these hung portraits of her more famous friends. The only furniture in the study consisted of wide-armed easy chairs, a lounge, and a solid oak desk with many drawers, littered by papers and manuscripts.

Gal Alex was seated at this desk, which stood in the middle of the room, when Ulic entered. She rose to greet him with some constraint, but no lack of kindness in her manner, and then asking him to sit down, resumed her place.

From the position in which he stood the light fell full upon his face, and in a glance she read the change the past fortnight had wrought in him. Her first feeling was gratification that he had loved her well enough to feel so deeply; her second, sorrow and self-reproach that she had caused him pain. The latter emotion expressed itself in her voice as she said:

"Why have you not been to see me?"

"I waited," he answered, "until you sent for me. Was it wrong?" he asked simply; "should I have come before?"

"I scarce know," she replied gravely, leaning forward and resting her head upon one hand. "Since that night I have been sadly confused, and until now could not speak of what is best for us."

That she had in thought joined his fate with hers, and in one word united herself with him, afforded him keen pleasure.

"But I have considered much," she continued, striving to speak calmly, lowering her eyes the while lest



he might read all they expressed of pain and sorrow, "and concluded it was best I should ask you to come here and listen to the story of my life, then you will learn the cause which parts us."

He felt rather than perceived the struggle she made, and said, "If it distresses you, I had rather you left it untold. At least, don't tell me now; wait until another time, or write if it will save you pain."

"No, no, no," she replied sadly, "it had best be spoken to-day: we all have to face pain some time; if experience accustoms, I should be braver now."

She paused a couple of minutes, for the struggle was harder than she anticipated. His sympathy left him wordless because of its depth.

"I have done wrong," she said, "and I now shrink from my punishment in the loss of your regard. Seeing months ago you were growing to care for me, I should have spoken before, and saved you from suffering by checking your affection; but it's hard for a woman to speak on such a subject before a man's words have plainly paved her way; and, moreover, your affection became so much to me I could not put it from me if I tried; for you cannot conceive," she said, tears welling up from her heart, "the comfort and sweetness an honest man's love gives a lonely woman's life."

Her pale face was wet with tears.

He sprang from his chair, and seating himself at the opposite side of the desk took one of her hands in both of his. Neither spoke for some time, but she by that one touch uniting them, understood all he would have said.

"Forgive me," she murmured, "I am weaker than I thought, but anxious days and sleepless nights have made me strangely nervous. From what I said you know," she added, anxious to finish her sentence, "or have suspected, I—I—am a wife."



The suspicion had risen in his mind and been promptly dismissed; now her words confirmed his surmise he started as if the idea occurred for the first time, and involuntarily removed his hand from hers. She glanced at him sorrowingly, then let her lids fall upon her burning cheeks.

"He is still living," said Ulic in a hard cold voice.

"He is still living," she repeated mechanically.

Her words were an impassable barrier shutting out hope, and filled with a sense of his own misery, he had no thought for her. But soon his better nature resuming its sway, some perception of the suffering she must have endured flashed on him, and thinking of her grief he forgot his own. He thrust forward his hands to her once more, as if in this mute way he would express his deepest feelings for her wrongs, his perfect confidence in her honour.

"Your trouble," he said huskily, "surely affords fresh claim to my affection. I would stand between you and all sorrow and misfortune; be to you more than all others, as you are more than all the world to me; and yet I know not what to say, only I would give my life to save you from pain."

All traces of suffering vanished from her eyes; a glow of pleasure transfigured her face, making her more youthful and beautiful than he had yet beheld her.

"Surely," she answered, "it is happiness enough for me to know I have so true a friend;" the shadows dwelling in her eyes departed from them.

The mental brightness surrounding and emanating from her pierced and dispelled the black weight of grief oppressing him, and for the first time during many days he felt comforted. For a while neither broke the spell felt equally by both; if only life were one prolonged period of these brief seconds, how happy could each



have been. Sorrow, care, and uncertainty fell from them; the world they inhabited was solely bounded and influenced by their own feelings; one was in all things sufficient to the other. At last, as troubled thoughts of earth long left behind may cross the memory of the blest, so did recollections of her past history cloud her present happiness; and with a sigh upon her lips, she said:

“Why is it, I wonder, youth is so often a period of bitter mistakes which later years in vain strive to repair? Filled with false trust in ourselves, sanguine because of our untried strength, we take steps which the efforts of time are unable to retrieve. No girl was happier than I during my early years. An orphan from childhood, I was reared by an aunt, who treated me as her daughter and regarded me as her heiress. Living in a quiet village on the Cornish coast, I was shut out from the world at large, and grew up wholly ignorant of its ways. I might never have known care or sorrow had I not one fatal hour met a man who possessed fascinations for me I was powerless to resist. From that day I lived. I was not wholly blind to the evil possibilities of his nature, which clearly pointed to rocks on which a woman's happiness might readily be wrecked; but his profession as a clergyman seemed to my inexperienced eyes a guarantee for his better feelings, and woman-like I feared and loved the danger before me.”

Ulic heard her with breathless attention.

“Knowing my aunt—who from the first had read him aright—would never consent to our union, he persuaded me to marry him privately, believing she might pardon me when our marriage was made known. In this he was mistaken. Heartily disliking the man, and aware his object was to gain her wealth through me, she expressed her displeasure by ignoring us. My husband soon moved to a more populous town, partly



that I might be separated from the one friend and protector I had in the world, but principally that amongst a larger community he might enjoy greater liberty of action. The knowledge of having wilfully deceived the kindest of relatives and best of women was a sorrow daily added to by a gradual perception that I had been wedded for sake of my expectations. The man to whom I had given the fulness of my girlish affections, soon wearied of a love he never valued and was incapable of returning."

She paused as if to gather strength, for there was that to come which gave her keener pain.

"I could have borne this," she continued, "but his scarce concealed profligacies revolted me. Henceforth my life with him became one scene of misery."

Again she hesitated, the colour flushing her cheeks, her breath coming hard and quick, her eyes avoiding the pitiful look of him to whom she bared the history of her life.

"By way of avenging his disappointment at receiving no portion with me," she went on, "he had recourse to a thousand petty tyrannies, and once when I resisted them he struck me to the ground. The blow killed the child I should have borne him."

Ulic clenched his right hand. "The brute," he exclaimed.

"Though painful for both of us, I must tell you all," she said, "that you may better understand my position. The bitterness which filled me, strengthened me to live through days of mental darkness. My heart froze, and all my love for him turned to loathing before a year of our wedded life had passed. He had rudely torn the mask from his character, and I saw how hopelessly irredeemable were his ways. To his other vices he added that of gambling. This passion led him from the card-table to the turf, which was finally the means



of his ruin; for, losing heavily, he had recourse to forgery, and being discovered, was convicted as a felon. This social catastrophe and bitter disgrace were welcome to me; not through a spirit of revenge, but from a sense of relief. The man who had wrecked my life because I loved him, was removed from me, and I was free from a foreboding of evil which had hung over me for months. I felt as if a weight had been lifted from my heart. Through this dreadful time I only recognized the fact of my freedom; and though I was severed from my youth by what seemed an existence of pain, some of its old brightness shone on me across the gulf parting my past and present. I should have been quite dependent on my own efforts for support had not my aunt taken me to her home. Leaving the country where my history was well known, we severed ourselves from all connection with its people, and settled in a quiet village in Surrey. I assumed my maiden name, and we took every precaution possible that my husband should not be able to trace us on his liberation."

"Did he strive to do so?" asked Ulic impatiently.

"I cannot say. In our new retreat we lived peaceably for years. So soon as the first sense of repose and relief had worn away, I felt perfect rest would henceforth become an impossibility to me. Like stains of blood on a murderer's hand, invisible to all eyes but his, so the contamination of a past unknown to the world weighed heavily upon me. Ghosts of the miserable year which I thought had been safely laid to rest, haunted me. In hours of quiet, when the pulse of thought beat slow, dire and cruel remembrances of black and bitter days passed in shadowy procession before my mental sight."

"Poor child!" he said.

"One day it occurred to me I could best rid myself



of these spectres by exposing them to the light of public gaze; if shared with the world at large, my secret must cease to oppress my life. I would write it down. Selecting a plot admitting situations like those I had known, yet sufficiently removed from actual events to escape detection, I told the history of my life, reflecting in my pages, passions and miseries I had experienced. You may remember the result. The world never fails to recognize the genuine mark of nature in art. I became famous by a single book. Some faint cry from a lonely woman's heart found answering echoes in the four quarters of the globe. In some mysterious way I touched hands with crowds and felt they were my kin."

She was silent a minute as if reviewing the past; Ulic did not disturb her.

"I had sheltered myself," she continued, "under the *nom de plume* of Gal Alex; but notwithstanding this a danger arose I had not foreseen, of my real name being discovered and my history revealed. The public is childishly curious regarding the private lives of those who amuse or instruct it; however, I managed to elude its inquiries until its first eagerness was gratified by a false and harmless sketch of my life invented by an ingenious editor of a society paper, and left uncontradicted by me. Naturally I shrank from publicity and coveted obscurity. Two years after the publication of my first novel, my aunt died, having settled on me all she possessed. The home in which she had been a familiar figure, brightening the dark places of my life, became henceforth unendurable. A solitary woman, I found the country depressing; the attraction luring the moth towards flame brought me to the centre of art and letters."

"And you came to London?"

"Yes; I fancied I could hide myself in this crowded



city. At first, though surrounded by millions, my life was as solitary as when I had lived in a Surrey village. Having few sympathies with the public at large and no ties I lived for my work alone. My whole existence was bounded by the worlds I created and governed; their denizens were my only friends; but at times loneliness pressed heavily upon me and I longed with keen longing for companionship. Years spent in this self-elected solitude, during which I never touched the hand of a woman I trusted, never heard the sound of a voice I loved, strengthened my nature. The old sense of fear and depression, sad results of a year of pain, gradually ceased to affect me. Moreover I had heard nothing of my husband since his conviction, and a hope that he would never again darken my life took possession of and filled me with courage. By degrees I allowed the strict seclusion long maintained to be intruded upon, and I entered society to receive a hearty welcome. Through my pages the world had come to know me, and its friendship dated back some years previous to our actual acquaintance. In the course of time men have asked my hand in marriage, but until I saw you, none had the power of awakening my love."

Ulic made a movement as if he would speak.

"I am coming to the end of my story," she said, placing her hand lightly on his arm, "let me finish. I speak plainly, for truth is ever best, and indeed concealment of my feelings from you would be impossible. Looking into my heart and seeing its affections had already escaped control, I became anxious and miserable; and as if my present happiness had touched some secret spring in the wonderful mechanism of nature, remembrances of my girlish love, with its tender awakening and bitter ending, came vividly back to me. A presentiment dwelt with me continually that



fate, having given me some years of peace, was about to turn a new page in my life. Nor was I wrong."

She leaned back in her chair, her face expressing dejection, her attitude betraying weariness.

"You will perhaps remember," she said, "we two sat in an alcove one evening at Mrs. Netley's house."

"As if it were but yesterday," he replied.

"And as we talked Benoni entered the room."

"And came straight towards us."

"Yes. I had heard of the wonderful power he possessed of reading the lives of those with whom he came in contact, and being naturally credulous regarding things supernatural, I believed the statements made and shrank from his observation."

"Yes," said Ulic eagerly.

"Nervous from fear and anxious to ascertain if his powers were such as had been stated, I asked him for a flower."

"And he produced a tulip or picked up one we had not noticed before."

"He did more than that."

"More?"

"As I glanced at the flower I saw it contained a note. This I concealed until I was alone. Here it is," she added, opening a little drawer and producing a slip of foreign note-paper, which she handed to Ulic, who read the following words: "Take courage. The day shall be when love will reign in your heart as a moon in heaven calming a troubled sea. In doubt or danger send for me. I would serve you."

"I pondered over these words night and day," she continued, "for they comforted me exceedingly. I no longer doubted or distrusted him; this bit of paper and the knowledge it seemed to convey of my past served as a bond between us. Three days before that on which you asked me to be your wife, I sent for him.



It had occurred to me that perhaps my husband no longer lived, and that even whilst I considered myself bound to him I was really a free woman. This idea, begotten of hope, could not readily be suppressed. I dared not make inquiries of the prison officials, and I knew none whom I could trust save you, whom I shrank from employing on such an errand. Therefore I requested Benoni to call on me. Finding he was not only aware of the principal acts but of the minute details of my life, I asked if my husband still lived. This he was unable to say at the time, but promised he would ascertain for me in a couple of days. I asked him to call on me one evening, at a time when I believed I should be alone; he selected that on which you spoke to me. You met him as you left the house."

"What did he say?" Ulic asked anxiously.

She bowed her head and her words came slow.

"That he was not only alive, but near me."

Ulic uttered a moan, but did not venture to speak for some seconds. Then he said, almost in a whisper, "Perhaps it is false; I shall make inquiries to-morrow."

"It is true," she said decisively.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"I have seen him."

"Here?"

"No, not here, thank God. A few minutes after you, on the night of the Keans' reception, had seen me to my brougham it was blocked for a moment at the corner of the street. As I looked up to see the cause, a face was thrust against the window, and in a second I recognized—my husband."

"Good heavens!" cried Tarbert.

During the short silence which ensued he strove to devise some means by which he could protect the woman he loved from the possible annoyance or ex-



posure this liberated felon might attempt, but none presented themselves to his troubled mind.

"And now," she said, nerving herself for a great effort, "forget you have ever spoken to me of your love; forget that you would have made me your wife."

"You are cruel," he said reproachfully.

"Only to be kind. Believe me it will be best. You are a man and love is not to you what it is to me. In a little while you will live down the disappointment felt at present; I will fade from your memory. Aye, it is best and wisest, no doubt, it should be so. It may be," she added, with a struggle for utterance, "another woman happier than I can ever be, may win the love I am powerless to accept; if so, dear friend——"

She broke down, and hid her face that he might not see her bitter tears.

"I shall never leave you, never forget you," he said.

She lifted her head and smiled sadly. "Never," she replied, "is a long time and the changes years bring are many."

"You doubt me?" he said.

"Not your present feelings. But why should you devote the best period of your life to me? Whilst that man exists we can never be more to each other than we are to-day; he may live as long as you, or longer than I. What I am going to say may be cruel, but is certainly true. You have seen a roller pass over a field; the ground which before was rough, is then levelled. The roller typifies time, levelling, not mounds, but subduing hearts. Leave me now, leave England; in a few years you will forget me, and some good woman will one day thank heaven for your love, even as I would have done could it have been lawfully mine.

He listened to her with a sinking heart, and gazed at her with reproachful eyes.



"This," he said, "is your affection for me; you cannot love me or you would never speak such words."

She strove to answer him, but failed. The struggle was again too strong for her, and once more she buried her head in her hands and cried as if her heart would break. It is bitter pain to see those we love suffer, whilst we look on powerless to aid.

"Poor child!" he said, writhing in his chair and knowing not what to say.

If she heard him she made no sign. A storm of tears, violent from suppression, shook her frame; her choking sobs alone broke the silence of the room. When her passion had almost exhausted itself he spoke to her.

"You did not mean to send me away?" he said.

"I did; it will be for your good."

"It might also be for my evil. Would it cause you pain if you were never to see me again?"

"Ah, you know it would; but I should strive to find comfort in thinking I had advised you for the best."

"And you would forget me?"

"God knows I never could."

"Then why ask me to forget you? Do you fancy your love for me is stronger than mine for you; that I could find peace or happiness wholly separated from you?"

"A woman's love is ever stronger than a man's; to her it is a principle of her life, to him an incident in his career."

"This is not true of all women nor of all men. It is not true of me. My affection for you is the keystone of my existence; take it away and my whole life falls to ruin. No, we must not part. You say we cannot be more than friends, then let us be friends indeed. There have been and are yet friendships existing between men and women more pure from their un-



selfishness, more noble from their disinterestedness than any other tie. The world, because of its inherent evil, neither understands nor appreciates such bonds; but need you care for its malice if your own heart acquits of wrong? I shall ask no more than to stand first in your love, that you may feel in this wide world you are not alone, that the strength of a heart loving you full well is yours to lean upon in trial and trouble. And if the sad tangle of your life is finally righted, then will I claim my reward; if not, we may be united eternally in another world, more merciful than this has been."

"And would you," she asked, love and admiration blended in her eyes, expressed in her voice—"would you wait for me all these years?"

"Aye, I would wait for you to the last day of my life."

"Surely," she said, "this is rare and perfect love, the highest man can know or woman inspire." Her face glowed with happiness and gratitude.

"You accept me as your friend?" he asked.

She gave him her hand, which he raised to his lips, and the bond between them was sealed.

"And now," he said, "that I am your counsellor in all things, let me enter at once upon the duties of my office. This man having discovered you, there is no knowing what tactics he may employ to distress or humiliate you. Let me guard and direct your life."

"You must not take my troubles upon yourself."

"This after all I have told you," he said reproachfully.

"Dear friend, may God bless you."

The words had scarce been uttered when both heard the bell ring through the house in a long-sustained peal. A moment later a servant knocked at the door, and entered the room bearing a note on a salver. Gal Alex opened it and read the single line it contained,



"I want to see you—Amos Berkeley." Her colour went and her hands trembled.

"Where is the bearer?" she asked.

"In the hall, ma'am."

"Let him remain there at present. Go into the dining-room whilst I write a reply, and come for it when I ring."

The servant quietly disappeared.

Gal Alex looked at Ulic. "Amos Berkeley," she said, "has come to see me."

"Who is he?"

"My husband," she answered.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### TRIUMPH AND TEMPTATION.

DURING the early hours of the day on which Ulic Tarbert called on Gal Alex, Mrs. Netley sat in the morning room of her house at Palace Gardens. It was yet too early for lunch, a fact accounting to some extent for the expression of dissatisfaction her homely feature bore. Certainly to her, as to others, the world looked brighter after luncheon, and far happier yet when dinner was a thing of the past. It is instructive to consider how hope rises as appetite is satiated; how peace with oneself and mankind is attained by an excellent meal.

The thoughts ruffling the serenity of Mrs. Netley's mind just now were such as the most dainty banquet could not permanently banish. Foremost amongst her grievances was the fact she yet remained a commoner, and Lord Pompey was still unwed. For three years she had devoted her energies to persuading him heaven



had destined her for his bride; and fearing he put more faith in judgments formulated on earth, she had striven to convince the world of her suitability for the desired position.

Mrs. Netley was aware that morally he was a *roué*, physically a wreck, intellectually a fool; but she likewise knew he was brother of a duke, and in true British spirit she prostrated herself before nobility—not of nature, which is merely God's handiwork, but of rank, which is of man's creation. To unite herself with the family of a peer; to have her alliance recorded in Debrett and Burke, was the highest ambition to which her feeble soul aspired. Having attained the title of courtesy which marriage with Lord Pompey would secure, she could die happily and pass into another sphere as a woman of distinction. Or, on the other hand, if the years of Lord Pompey's married life were few, grief would not rend her heart, and consolation for his absence would remain to her in belief he had gone to a world where consideration due to his rank would temper the treatment he received.

He had accepted her blandishments with charming courtesy, had smiled graciously at her wiles, continually availed himself of her hospitality, but had not offered to make her his wife. He had fluttered airily gracefully and brightly around her, but when she had sought to capture him he had tantalisingly flown away; an action which occasioned her vexation of spirit.

This conduct on Lord Pompey's part was caused by the remembrance of his brother, the sixteenth Duke of Bloomsbury, a shrivelled old mummy with a wig, a prominent nose, and red eyelids, who entertained the uttermost respect and admiration for himself as head of his illustrious house.

The anniversary of the day it had pleased heaven to send him on earth, he invariably celebrated by clothing



himself in the tarnished splendour of a court suit, wearing the garter on his shrivelled knee, and the blue ribbon of the order, somewhat besmeared with snuff, across his shrunken breast. The sight of such pomp and state had due effect upon a circle of poor relations bidden to celebrate this annual festivity, as likewise upon Lord Pompey's somewhat feeble mind.

Now the latter had once outraged his noble family by marriage with a player; and when the catastrophe came which left him penniless, or, in the words of his counsel pleading for divorce, "ruined the happiness of his life," he was only taken back to his own on condition that he never contracted a second alliance without gaining the consent of the head of his house. Lord Pompey had always stood in reverent awe of his ducal brother, and notwithstanding the financial advantages a union with Mrs. Netley would insure, felt reluctant to introduce into the family circle a lady whose antecedents were said to have been connected with pork.

For three years Mrs. Netley had wooed Lord Pompey, and now concluded if he remained indifferent to her wishes, she would devote her energies to some more hopeful object. A woman of clear judgment and keen foresight, she had conceived a plan she trusted would decide her fate regarding him. She resolved on asking him to luncheon, and the repast being finished, announcing her intention of going abroad and remaining there an indefinite period. If ever he intended making her his wife, he would then, she argued, when there was a possibility of her being lost to him for ever, declare his intentions. If he remained silent she would draw her own conclusions, and, journeying to the continent, seek there the distinction her country refused.

In France and Italy, she understood, titles were



easily purchased ; invariably creatures with waxed moustaches were attached to them, who frequently became hindrances to domestic bliss ; but the matrimonial lottery was all chance and no certainty. Foreign titles, she reflected, had an imposing sound, though English people sneered at them as being frequently associated with charlatans or bankrupts. Her wealth, she felt confident, would win the regard and envy of a nobility whose purses were as light as their pedigrees were long ; and no doubt some poor prince, a noble creature with a haughty mien, the inheritor of a historic name and a ruined palace by a lake, in which he never bathed, would offer her his heart for a certain consideration. What would it matter were he a pagan, or even a papist, if she could boast of the blood-stained traditions of her house ? What would she care even if the last penny of her fortune was swallowed by his debts, and she was compelled to live on macaroni and Parmesan cheese for the remainder of her life, so long as she was a Marquese del Malachite or a Princess de Paladin ? As Richard the Third offered his kingdom for a horse, so was she willing to give her fortune for a title.

Thinking over her foreign prospects for a time reduced her anxiety concerning Lord Pompey. He was not in himself romantic ; his title was one of courtesy, and the ravages of time were perceptible in his appearance on days when his valet was careless. But then he belonged to a ducal family, and English dukes, no matter how ignoble their origin, were regarded by all mortals who were not low radicals with fear and trembling. She would feel happier in marrying Lord Pompey than in facing the uncertainties of a foreign market. To-day must certainly decide her actions ; by his manner would she shape her future course.

A secondary cause for the gravity expressed in her broad features was the result of her niece's marriage.



Miriam had wed the man of her choice, but Mrs. Netley's common sense enabled her to see this union, like so many marriages made for love, had not resulted in happiness.

Philip Amerton was in all seeming an excellent husband, and his wife made no complaint, but there existed between them a lack of sympathy, less difficult to perceive than explain. Mrs. Netley might have accepted this as the usual result of matrimony, but it grieved her not a little that since his union Philip gradually shrank from society and had failed to introduce his wife to personages of light and leading amongst whom he was a familiar spirit. This Mrs. Netley on behalf of her niece resented.

She had always considered Philip eccentric, but since his marriage, and especially within the last three months, his constant abstraction, seeming depression, and visible weariness struck her as being decidedly odd, and utterly unbecoming in a newly-married man. Between him and Mrs. Netley thorough friendship had never existed; now Philip avoided her whenever it was possible to do so without rudeness. To-day she had asked him and his wife to luncheon, but as usual, he had refused, and by way of filling his place Mrs. Netley had bidden Colonel Tarbert, he being the first person whose name arose in her memory. That there was danger in bringing him and her niece together somewhat frequently, as she had of late, never occurred to her unsuspicious mind; for assuredly she considered, if a girl had declined a man's affections whilst she was free to accept them, she would feel less inclined to receive when bound to reject them. Not being a philosopher, Mrs. Netley was unaware that what we regard with indifference when within our grasp, assumes inordinate allurements and disproportionate value once beyond our reach. In fact, for many months past her



thoughts being wholly centred on Lord Pompey to the exclusion of all other interests, she did not therefore perceive that between Colonel Tarbert and Mrs. Amer-ton an intimacy had sprung up which afforded gossip to the town.

Mrs. Netley was still busy with her schemes regarding Lord Pompey when Miriam entered. Seating herself in a low chair beside her aunt she said:

"Philip could not come to-day, as he wrote to tell you."

"Humph," said Mrs. Netley, tossing back her head impatiently.

"He said I was to plead his excuses; he is very busy just now."

"That's what he always says."

"He has signed an agreement to write a story for the 'Washington Magazine,' and is behindhand with the greater portion of it; he says he will never again undertake to write a serial unless he can place the completed manuscript in the editor's hands before a chapter of it is printed. I heartily wish this was finished."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Netley, scanning her niece's face, and noting it had lost much of its usual brightness.

"Well, he works too hard, and then becomes terribly irritable; the slightest thing upsets him."

"But he doesn't visit his temper upon you, I hope, dear; that's a thing a young wife should put down at once or her future life may become a martyrdom."

"It is not temper," replied the younger woman, "he never complains, nor has he ever used a harsh word to me; it might be easier to bear if he would, only he becomes restless, looks worn, and grows tired of all things."

"He wants change; you must make him go abroad for a few weeks."



"I'm afraid he wouldn't take my advice on that subject; you see it would interfere with his work, and I fancy he lives for that alone," she concluded with an air of sadness.

"Nonsense, child, I'm sure he's fond of you; but young wives are always jealous of whatever occupies their husbands' time. Would you have him tied to your apron-string all day long?"

Mrs Amerton neither smiled nor replied; it was doubtful if she heard the last remark. After a few seconds spent in abstraction or deliberation she said:

"Do you know, I fear I have never understood him, and that I am unsuited to be his wife. He should have married some clever woman who would have helped him in his work, and been more a companion than I can ever be to him."

"You mustn't think that, child. A clever man shouldn't marry a fool, but he certainly shouldn't wed a woman as wise as himself, or they would hate each other in a month. No, my dear, your husband is somewhat eccentric—most authors are I have heard, and indeed they have always seemed odd to me—but you will come to understand his ways in the course of a little time, and settle down as happily as most husbands and wives."

"Do you really think so?" she asked, as if such a probability seemed most uncertain to her.

"I'm certain of it."

"Do you know—" Miriam began, and then paused abruptly, adding after a slight pause, "I doubt if I had better tell you."

"I am so much older, my dear, and my advice may be able to help you," replied the matron, who if somewhat foolish regarding the one ambition of her life, was kindly and sensible when confronted with other subjects.



"Well, I scarce like to admit it even to myself," said the young wife, "but I fear Philip doesn't love me."

"If not, he would never have married you."

"He may have wed me because of some passing fancy, which has worn itself out in a few months."

Mrs. Netley smiled complacently before answering.

"That is what all young wives think. They expect a man to keep at the honeymoon fever-heat of devotion all his life; and when he sobers down to every day affection, they imagine he no longer cares for them. It is not in human nature that a man should continue violently in love with his wife after the first six months of wedded life. My dear, be rational, and take the world as it comes and humanity as it is, and make the best of them."

"Ah," replied the younger woman, "you don't understand."

"Of course not; when two persons don't agree to think alike on a common subject, one always believes the other doesn't understand. But of one thing rest assured, Philip is very fond of you."

If Mrs. Amerton believed her aunt, the words brought no consolation in their train; no gleam of satisfaction lit her face. Perceiving this, Mrs. Netley like many others, became the more anxious to convince, because having little faith in her assertions.

"Besides," she said, "literary men of all others must live so much to themselves and in the world they create, not merely when engaged upon the mere mechanical labour of writing, but whilst thinking of their characters and weaving their plots; and if they are silent and absorbed a wife may naturally think herself neglected. With painters it is different; they talk whilst they work, and can judge of effects when colours are on the canvas. But an author must gauge his labour



mentally, and the full effort of his mind must be devoted to his task."

Still Mrs. Amerton remained unsatisfied with her aunt's explanations; womanlike she would not be persuaded against her will. She remained silent for some time, looking straight before her the while, then, as if continuing a train of thought, said:

"If it were not for Benoni, I fancy Philip would not be as he is; but the mystic is continually with him, and after his visits, Philip seems to shrink from me as if I burdened his life. This man has some influence over him I dread without understanding."

"Dear child," replied the matron, anxious to comfort her niece, "mysticism is but a passing craze from which he will recover in a few months. It's the fashion to-day; a couple of years ago it was æstheticism, now it is occultism; next year it will be some other ism, for men and women are but grown children, and must have toys to play with and keep them amused."

"If I thought it was merely a passing fancy of his, I would——" she stopped suddenly and then began a fresh sentence: "What you say may be true regarding the world, but concerning Philip, I believe it is different. With him mysticism is no craze, but part of his life, and I feel sure he will never change."

Before Mrs. Netley could reply, the door opened and Colonel Tarbert was announced. Miriam had not known he would be present, and her first feeling of surprise was succeeded by one of pleasure. His heavy-lidded eyes glittered as they fell upon her, and the smile of self-satisfaction usually lingering in the lines round his mouth, broadened perceptibly. He was soon seated between Mrs. Netley and Miriam, talking volubly on topics of the day.

Presently Lord Pompey came tripping into the room and smiling joyously as if he and all the world were



young. His tall figure was carefully packed in faultlessly fitting clothes; his auburn hair was beautiful to behold; his cheeks glowed with a colour representative of rude health and happy youth.

Luncheon was soon announced, but before entering the dining-room, Mrs. Netley found an opportunity of saying to her niece:

"My dear, I want to have a few minutes' private conversation with dear Lord Pompey after lunch; you will see that I have an opportunity. Afterwards I may have something to communicate to you," she added, with a smile conveying volumes of meaning.

The luncheon was veritably a dainty banquet—light appetising, delicate, exhilarating. The dishes which continual experience had taught Mrs. Netley Lord Pompey best appreciated were set before him. He toyed with truffles, tasted ortolans, drank claret of a famous vintage, and champagne which had come from an imperial cellar. He enjoyed himself to the full, as did Colonel Tarbert likewise; but their companions being anxious, by no means participated in their satisfaction.

"Every one is talking of your husband's article on 'Modern Mysticism' in the 'Nineteenth Century,'" said Colonel Tarbert to Mrs. Amerton.

"I must say I don't understand it," remarked Lord Pompey.

"I can quite believe that," answered the Colonel, emphatically.

"Eh," said Lord Pompey, "wonder what he means?"

"Mysticism, you see, is not meant to be understood."

"You sometimes read, Lord Pompey?" asked Mrs. Amerton.

"Yes, frequently—when I want to sleep."



"Then what form of literature do you select—news-papers?"

"No, I never read daily papers; it is quite a waste of time. I did once, but the effect was unpleasant; their eternal politics, vulgar tragedies, and sensational leaders got mixed in my dreams."

"You should read shilling novels."

"Wonder," he soliloquized, "if she writes them. All women do nowadays; must ask her—hem." Then he said aloud, whilst a faded simper spread itself across the bright colours of his complexion, "Do you, my dear young lady, write books?"

"No," she replied, "I'm not clever enough."

"Alphonse Carr says," Colonel Tarbert remarked, "a woman who writes, commits two sins—she increases the number of books, and decreases the number of women."

"He was a foreigner," Mrs. Netley said.

"And, by gad, a gallant man," added Lord Pompey.

"Certainly a wise one," said the colonel.

"If some of our friends heard you they would not be pleased."

"Perhaps not," replied the colonel. "A couple of generations ago every woman believed she was sent into the world for a husband; but now the majority are convinced their mission is to write; and since the days of Charlotte Brontë, every rectory sends forth its volumes yearly, yet no second 'Jane Eyre' has appeared."

"You agree with Alphonse Carr?" asked Mrs. Netley.

"Thoroughly."

"And think women were sent into existence——"

"Merely to mate with man."

Mrs. Netley rose; they all entered an adjoining sitting-room. The hostess seated herself on the sofa,



leaving room for a second person. A low fire burned on the hearth close by; she took up a hand-screen to shield her face from observation and protect her eyes from the blaze. Lord Pompey followed and sat down beside her, whilst Mrs. Amerton and Colonel Tarbert, having lingered for a while over an etching of Andrea Mantegna's Dance of Nymphs, withdrew into a smaller drawing-room.

"Charming woman," said Lord Pompey from his corner of the sofa; "figure portly and not ungraceful; hands and face a trifle coarse, but then not bad style in all; and what a delightful hostess," he added, observing her critically, and shaking his head into which the champagne had flown.

"Lord Pompey," said his companion severely, because displeased with his audible remarks, "I have come to a decision this week, which as an old friend, I must tell you."

"Thank you," he replied, with a simper, adding in an aside, "Wonder what the deuce is coming."

"I am about to leave England."

"To leave England," he echoed in genuine surprise, for such a possibility had never occurred to him. "For long?" he asked.

"It may be for years," she answered pathetically.

"Deuce take it, she doesn't want to marry me after all," he said *sotto voce*, feeling hurt because of her want of taste or lack of enterprise, but appreciating her all the more.

"You see," she added, stimulated by success to continue her part, "I can readily let my house, and my niece being married I have no ties binding me to England."

"Didn't think I'd lose her like this," he muttered; then added in a louder key, "where are you going?"

"To Italy," she answered.



"Some foreign adventurer will marry her," he considered aloud, "some fellow with a tenor voice, a guitar, and a romantic name; they are always waiting for English widows or American heiresses."

"Of course," Mrs. Netley remarked, with a touch of pathos in her voice, "it will be quite a wrench to part from many friends, and—and from you in particular, dear Lord Pompey."

"Dear lady," he said; then speaking to himself added, "Gad, she's in love with me after all—clever woman—excellent taste, egad."

Mrs. Netley waited, played with her hand-screen, and then threw down her trump card. "No matter," she said, "where I am, by whom I may be surrounded, I shall think of you, and ever dear Lord Pompey, with tenderness."

She laid the hand nearest him on the sofa, perceiving which he immediately seized it in both his own.

"Gad," he soliloquized audibly, "I have a mind to risk it: if she goes away I may never see her again, women are capricious; but the Married Women's Property Act plays the deuce with a fellow though. I'll get her to make a settlement on me."

"And if," said Mrs. Netley with a sigh, "we should never meet again—you, dear Lord Pompey, will think of me—sometimes?"

"I shall think of you for ever. You are awfully good, you know."

"How you flatter me."

"Yes, I always flatter women; gad they like it; deuce take them if they don't. But must you really go?"

"It is best I should."

"Then," he said, "I'll go with you."

Mrs. Netley's heart sank; she was not quite certain of his meaning.



"Lord Pompey," she replied gravely, "that cannot be. What would the world say?"

"I mean, don't you know, go with you as your husband."

He took her hand and glued his lips to it for a second. A sense of triumph suddenly filled Mrs. Netley's heart; a broad smile of satisfaction beamed across her massive face, the hour long hoped for had come at last. Her loathsome association with pork in the past would be merged for ever and forgotten in her marriage with a member of a ducal house. Oh, day of tardy approach! Oh, hour of perfect satisfaction! That for which she had struggled long and striven greatly was at hand, and joy rose in her breast as a sun o'er the land, for the dawn of her life had awakened and the world was glad.

"Then," she said softly, "you really love me so much?"

"More, far more," he replied, coming closer to her and putting his arm around her ample waist.

"Ah," she exclaimed, drawing nearer to him, "I cannot resist you."

"No," he answered, "they never could. They say," he added in a minor tone, "she has a deuced lot of money;" then aloud, "You have plenty of——no, that's not what I mean; deuced bad memory——oh yes——I was about to say I was fond of you——very——and all that sort of thing."

"You have long since gained my heart; believe me I am wholly yours."

"Yes, so you are," he replied, supporting her head on his padded breast.

"His manners are so distinguished," she reflected; "no vulgar demonstration, perfect self-possession, natural elegance."

"We will go abroad," he said, "after our marriage."



"You can name our wedding day."

"Egad, let it be to-morrow if you like."

"No, no," she said impressively; "no indecent haste. There will be settlements to make"—Lord Pompey smiled—"and you will present me to your family——"  
Lord Pompey frowned.

"Yes, yes," he replied, in tones that struck his hearer as being without gladness.

"And now," said Mrs. Netley, "let us seek my niece that we may communicate the news at once."

When Mrs. Amerton and Colonel Tarbert had passed into the smaller drawing-room some sense of reserve and distrust of her strength helped to render her nervous and ill at ease. For the influence which this man's presence had of old exercised over her returned in full force; now she had pledged her faith to another its existence became more harmful than before, and fraught with danger she shrank from contemplating.

In quiet hours the question had risen in her mind whether after all she had been wise in refusing to accept Colonel Tarbert as her husband. Philip was a dreamer amongst men, a man of lofty ideals and keen sensibilities, to whose mental height it gradually broke upon her she could never rise. With Colonel Tarbert she was already on a common plane. There was that in his nature which appealed to hers but made her not a better woman.

Awaking to the knowledge she was Philip Amerton's wife, she had striven to put such thoughts from her; yet stealthily as an enemy upon his unguarded victim, they had returned again and again, and would not be kept at bay. Colonel Tarbert, who had come to occupy much of her mental life, was constantly in her presence. Philip seldom accompanied her when she visited, yet believing it pleased her, was anxious she should maintain acquaintance with the world of Kensington at



large. With most of her friends Colonel Tarbert was likewise intimate, and therefore continually met her at their homes. And in some way, though she was unaware of the fact, it had come to be recognized that when he appeared all other friends of Mrs. Amerton gave him place, and left him to the enjoyment of undisturbed conversation with her. Though she looked forward to these meetings with pleasure, she had never sought to bring them about, and therefore shrank from considering them disloyalty to her husband.

Colonel Tarbert's influence stole over her so gradually that she remained ignorant of its progress, and would only wake to its existence to discover its strength. For in no way had he sought to disturb the serenity of their intercourse by forcing it to deeper and more dangerous feelings. Calculating even in his passions, he had resolved to gain her love, for its own sake, and at the same time avenge himself upon his rival. It had given him a fiendish delight to find the man whom he sought to wrong unconsciously aiding him in his malicious efforts. Closely observing this woman whom he loved as well as it was possible for one of his nature to love, he became aware Amerton's affection for her had abated, and though this deprived Tarbert of one sting, enough would be left in the outrage he meditated against Amerton's honour. Philip and he had seldom encountered since the former had returned to England, but when they did the husband's intuition made him shrink from the man who met him with fair words and kindly smiles.

Had Miriam foreseen she would have been forced by circumstances to an uninterrupted conversation with Colonel Tarbert, she would have avoided the occasion. Now she could not escape she sought to overcome the nervousness and dread of she knew not what that seized possession of her.



"It is such a long time since we met," said the colonel, "I began to wonder when I should see you again."

"Long time," she replied. "Why, it's only four days."

"But four days are four ages to me."

She felt his eyes were fixed upon her, and she looked straight ahead not venturing to meet his gaze.

"Are you not going abroad this winter?" she asked somewhat abruptly, hoping yet fearing she might receive an affirmative answer to her inquiry.

"I don't know;" he said, "it depends on circumstances." A sneer spread itself across his face. "You see," he continued, "my brother who has been long an invalid, is very bad just now, and it might be wiser for me to stay."

"You would," she said, scarce heeding her words, but anxious they should divert him from the channel into which she felt his thoughts had turned—"you would feel sorry if anything happened to him."

"Sorry to come into a title and an unencumbered estate;" he replied laughingly. "Oh, very, I assure you." Then seeing his merriment jarred upon her he added, "Of course I should regret poor Kerry, but then he has never enjoyed life—at least after my fashion."

"But he may have after his own."

"Deuced slow I should think: the best of his days have been spent amongst dry and dusty books, a heartless, bloodless company at best. Give me life in the full current of enjoyment, even if it lasts but a year; wine that enriches the blood, adventures that quicken the heart, women whose smiles are as sunshine to existence."

"You forget yourself," she said, striving to seem severe.



"No, no, but I remember you."

"Colonel Tarbert," she replied, her heart beating rapidly.

"Nay, don't be angry with me. Do you remember," he continued, "that only eighteen months ago I asked you to marry me? Since then I have felt miserable, thinking of you as the wife of another man, for I have never ceased to love you."

His words fell on her ears with a sense of gladness for which her heart smote her. "You must not say that," she said almost in a whisper.

"Why not?"

"Because we cannot undo the past, even if we would."

"That is sheer nonsense. Must you be tied for ever to the word you uttered in mistake? Must your whole life be ruined because of a promise given in error?"

"No, no," she cried, scarce knowing what to answer in the confusion of her thoughts, "not given in error."

"But I say it was," he said, growing bolder from seeing her deliberate. "You didn't know then the man you accepted as your husband would become a fanatic—little better than a lunatic—the dupe of an Eastern juggler."

"This is not true," she replied, feeling the while his words echoed her thoughts.

"It is true, and you know it well; all the world talks of and laughs at him as a madman."

"How dare you say this to me?" she answered, still struggling with herself.

But all effort to hide the inward strife besetting her was vain; seeing which, a gleam of triumph shone balefully in her companion's eyes, an evil smile deepened the lines round his mouth. His opportunity had come, and he seized it readily.



"Now listen to me," he said in quiet tones. "What I am going to say may be hard for you to hear, but may help you to happiness eventually. You are only in Amerton's way; he has become an ascetic, and you are but a millstone round his neck. If it weren't for you he would quit London, go to India, become an adept or some other kind of lunatic, and be happy after his own fashion; but weighted with you, he can do nothing."

She was powerless to reply; feeling what the tempter said was true, she did not dare contradict him.

"Leave him," said the colonel, bending down his head until his face almost touched hers—"leave him and come with me. You know I have always loved you, and I feel sure you care for me. Let us go abroad, and when your husband has obtained a divorce I swear I shall make you my wife."

She was silent. The struggle within was great; all that was good and bad in her nature waged a warfare, in which one would be slain for ever, and meanwhile she stood by as a trembling spectator, conscious how much depended on the victor.

"Won't you come with me?" he whispered, and then more determinedly continued, "By heavens, you shall. Why waste your life with this shadow of a man? For your own sake, for mine, aye for his, if you still care for him, come with me. In some quiet corner of Europe we will forget the past, and you will begin existence afresh with me. You shall be the happiest woman living: only tell me you will come."

He flung all the strength of his desires into his words, but yet she wavered and made no reply. He smothered a curse rising to his lips and cried out, "You are cold as a statue; have you no heart?"

"I am wicked," she replied in a low voice, "to let you say such words to me, and yet——"



He waited anxiously, but she did not continue.

"Would it not be more wicked to blight your whole life by refusing this certain happiness? Only say you will come."

"Not now, not now," she gasped. "Your words have bewildered me; my brain is on fire, and I know not what I say."

"You shall answer me now or never," he replied, seeing her weakness was his opportunity. "Say yes, and I am your slave for life; say no, and you shall never see me again."

"Ah," she said, "you are cruel; you torture me, and yet you have no mercy."

"Love is ever cruel. Only answer me and your torture ends. Shall I be yours, or do we indeed part?"

Before she had time to reply Mrs. Netley's voice was heard in the next room.

"Answer me at once, yes or no," the tempter said imperatively.

"No," she said falteringly; then added, "Thank God, I'm saved."

Colonel Tarbert muttered curses, but before he had time to speak, Mrs. Netley appeared.

"My dear," she said, in her own joy not heeding her niece's confusion, "you and Colonel Tarbert also must hear the news. Dear Lord Pompey has at length persuaded me to become his wife."

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### HUSBAND AND WIFE.

THE surprise which Ulic Tarbert and Gal Alex felt at the sudden mention of Amos Berkeley's name was



great. Neither spoke for a while ; but in their interchanged glances she read the pity he expressed for her, he the trustfulness she felt in him.

"What am I to do ?" she asked.

"You must see him," he replied.

She shrank back as if the suggestion was not only unwelcome but unexpected.

"It is best," Ulic continued, "to discover what steps he means to take, and see how he will behave, that you may gauge his intentions towards you. Dismiss him and you are left in suspense regarding his movements, and open to be molested by him at the first opportunity."

"I had not thought of that."

"Before he enters I shall step out of the room on to the lawn here ; it may be as well I should know him, and you may feel greater security in the assurance that I am at hand."

"You are indeed a valuable friend," she answered ; "it will give me courage and strength to feel you are near."

"Let me advise you. From what I can learn of this man he is a coward and therefore a bully. Don't let him see you fear him ; refuse his demands if they are extortionate, for I have no doubt he comes for money ; don't offer to buy his silence or he will haunt you ; but promise him a small annuity on condition that he troubles you no more. Now summon the servant, say you have changed your mind and will see him ;" and he touched the bell.

When the maid appeared, Gal Alex asked, "Did you say I had a visitor ?"

"No ma'am, I said you were busy."

"Tell the bearer of the note I can spare him five minutes, and show him in here."

The interval between the servant's exit and the arrival of this unwelcome visitor seemed an age of pain,



broken by one interval of hope when Ulic Tarbert, before leaving the room, had taken her hand for a second and whispered one word, "courage," in her ear. At last the door opened; she neither turned nor looked, but kept her eyes steadily fixed on some papers before her. At length she suddenly raised them and found herself alone with her husband. He was standing near the closed door carefully examining the room.

Any expectations she had formed by no means prepared her for the change time had wrought in him. The moral degradation which convict life entails was vividly marked on him. His face had coarsened in every feature, a hard defiant look shone in his eyes, his slouching gait bespoke enforced humiliations. Looking at him she wondered if this could be the man she had once loved with all the force and tenderness of first affection. The horror and hate she had experienced during the last months of her life with him returned with increased force.

Something stronger than years of absence, more potent than painful circumstances, separated them now as a gulf neither might cross again. The subtle evil his disposition had developed with passing years could never be bound by a common link with the forces of her character which solitude and thought had strengthened and purified. Sundered by the differences of their moral natures, they stood apart as children of diverse races.

Throwing himself with an affectation of ease he entirely lacked into the chair recently occupied by Ulic Tarbert, the Rev. Amos Berkeley, otherwise Jacob Glender, said:

"So I have found you at last, Mrs. Amos Berkeley."

She visibly winced at sound of a name not heard for years; the tone of his voice vividly recalled scenes of indescribable pain.



"And glad I am," he continued, glancing around, "to find you in such easy circumstances."

"Why have you come here?" she asked.

"To see you, of course," he replied, with a grin.

"What is it you want?"

Something in her self-possessed manner warned him of the change time had wrought in her since they parted, and a sense of disappointment fell upon him. She might not prove the easy dupe he had expected to find.

"I want my wife." He uttered the words slowly and deliberately, watching their effect upon her as a doctor might the process of narcotics on his patient.

Save that the blood faded from her face, she gave no other indication of her feelings by word or movement.

"My time," she said presently, seeing he made no attempt to continue, "is much occupied. I feel satisfied you have come for some purpose, state it and leave me."

Her coolness surprised and provoked him; he set his massive jaws determinedly, and then said, "You have asked me to state my purpose. I have come here for you—my wife."

The room swam round her; the fear haunting her quiet years was suddenly realized; the avalanche which had threatened her life had fallen. She was not, however, prepared to endure this fate, and had long since determined on resistance should it assail her. Therefore, recovering herself, she said, quietly and resolutely:

"Were we to live a century, you and I could never be more to each other than strangers."

"The law shall enforce you to live with me."

"Never. I should welcome the social disgrace which the public knowledge that I am your wife would entail, rather than live with you under what change of name you please to assume."



She heard him curse her, but paid no attention to his words.

"Listen," she continued; "you come here labouring under the impression I am the cowed, dejected woman from whom you parted. I was then little more than a child. Friendless, helpless, ignorant of the world, the sorrow you cruelly thrust upon me crushed my spirit; but I have changed since then. Years have brought experience. You who of all others were bound to protect me, weighted my youth with misery, betrayed my trust, mocked my affection, gave me a coward's blow. All this I bore submissively then; but that period of my life being passed, new strength was given me, and rather than live under one roof with you, I would welcome death itself."

The fervour of her words brought conviction of their truth to his mind. He had made a mistake in believing the woman who had been his former victim would become his present dupe. The proposal of claiming her as his wife had been made without intention of carrying it into execution, but solely from a desire to alarm and thereby obtain from her certain demands he had come to make. His object having failed, he proceeded to make a fresh move.

"Well," he said, striving to assume an air of ease, "if we don't live together, we can at least share our property with each other."

She looked at him with quiet scorn. "You mean that I should share my money with you?"

"If you choose to put it in that way—yes."

"Then you are again mistaken."

"What's yours is mine in the eye of the law, and, by heavens, I'll have it."

"You forget," she said, "the Married Women's Property Act."

He had not forgotten it, but trusted her ignorance



of its existence would befriend him. He clenched his teeth and looked at her with vengeful eyes.

"Look here," he said doggedly, "let us have no more beating about the bush. You are rich, I need money. Give me five hundred pounds. Keep your name and your secret, but let me have the cash."

The expression of his face and tone of his voice brought back recollections of days and nights of fear and misery. She nerved herself to resist him.

"You shall not have any money from me," she said.

He stretched across the desk and whispered:

"Take care, take care, or you may drive me to that which will ruin you."

"No act of yours," she replied, "can injure me in the world's sight, so long as I keep apart from you."

"You force me to speak in plainer terms. What's yours is mine, and if I cannot have it by fair means I will have it by foul."

"Do you mean," she asked, some idea of his threat flashing on her mind, "you will have recourse to forgery?"

"I may be tempted to write your name upon a cheque. Bring me to justice, and the world shall learn it is a wife who prosecutes her husband; it will be a nice story for all your fine friends."

"If you have such intentions," she replied, "I give you fair warning to beware of your danger. From this date my bankers shall be advised to carefully examine the signatures of my cheques. If a forgery is discovered, as I am a living woman, the law shall deal with you as with a common criminal. I am not going to buy your silence or submit to my ruin."

He left his chair and came close to her side, his hands clenched, his face distorted by rage; but she neither shrank from him nor cried for help, though Tarbert's name was on her lips. Her heart beat rapidly



and her nerves quivered from excitement, yet she strove to be brave, knowing much depended on her preserving the appearance of courage. She lifted her eyes to his, and he retreated before her gaze, muttering to himself. This woman whom he had formerly regarded as the slave of his wishes, and expected to find fearful of his influence and pliant to his desires, defied him. For some minutes he stood leaning against a bookshelf, not knowing what move he should next make, and unwilling to own himself defeated.

Her fear of him in no way abated, his presence was no less irksome than at his first entrance, and she felt the interview must end quickly or strength and courage would desert her. She strove, however, to maintain their semblance to the last, and summoning all her fortitude, began:

"You see I reject your proposals and defy your threats; but I now of my own free will make a proposition, which if you are wise you will accept."

He nodded his head by way of intimating his attention.

"Most men with experiences such as yours," she said, "would be glad to lead a new life if opportunities were offered them. I shall place them in your way. My solicitor will pay you two hundred a year, provided I never see or hear from you again. If ever you come to my house, write to or molest me, from that day your pension shall be suspended. This sum will allow you to live honestly, take the chance it affords you, and now go."

The expression of his eyes as he looked at her sent a shudder through her frame.

"Come," he said, "your bite is worse than your bark. Make it double the sum and I take you at your word. It isn't every day," he added with a chuckle, "a woman can secure her liberty for four hundred a year; few husbands would prove so reasonable as I, but then I'm not one of the jealous sort, you see, and am willing——"



"The sum I have named," she interrupted, refusing to hear more, "will place you above temptation. I shall not increase it by even a pound. Let me know your decision at once; I shall not repeat my offer."

"Well," he answered, "two hundred a year is not to be despised."

"You will remember the conditions."

"Though they may be hard for an affectionate husband to maintain, I'll think of them."

"I suppose you have no desire to be known as the Rev. Amos Berkeley?"

"Right you are," he replied with an air of audacity.

"Set me down as Jacob Glender!"

She wrote the name; then taking an envelope, gave him the address of her solicitors. He twirled the paper in his fingers before thrusting it into his pocket.

"Does payment date from to-day?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied briefly.

"Sorry I didn't find you sooner, I'd have called like a dutiful husband."

She made no reply.

His business had come to an end, but he lingered. "She has been too clever for me," he thought, "but if ever the chance comes I shall make her pay heavily for this bargain."

He looked round the handsomely appointed room and then at her, and slouchingly walked from her presence. With strained ears she listened to his footsteps in the passage, and heard the street door bang behind him.

"Thank God it is over," she cried, leaning back in her chair. Her overstrained senses gave way; the whole room swam round her, but in the last efforts for mastery made by her fleeting consciousness, she recognized as in a dream Ulic Tarbert's anxious face bending over her. Then all was darkness and repose.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## A DARK DAY.

EARLY in September Mrs. Henry Netley and Lord Pompey Rokeway were made man and wife. The marriage had been celebrated with all the pomp and state, glitter and show dear to Mrs. Netley's heart. No hint that the church service, celebrated by a learned prelate, assisted by doctors of high degree, canons of dignified mien, and a surpliced choir, merely ratified a commonplace bargain such as public markets witness daily, escaped the polite lips or was betrayed in the gracious glances of Lady Pompey's guests.

At the wedding breakfast the bride of fifty summers sat shivering in filmy garments; beside her the semblance of a man, wigged, rouged, padded, and stayed, yet ghastly, as if Death himself, tricked out in finery, had taken his place at the board to mock the marriage feast.

The Duke of Bloomsbury, who, taking Mrs. Netley's wealth into consideration, had given his consent to the alliance, was present, and continually mopped his red-rimmed eyes with a handkerchief, not because of their tears, but of their tenderness. The duchess likewise attended, and breakfasting over heartily, for a subsequent week visited the irritability of indigestion equally on her aged poodle and her illustrious husband.

His grace made a feeble speech which no one understood, during which, without ceasing to masticate, his consort grumbled audibly, probably by way of expressing her dissent to his mild remarks, as was her invariable custom. When later on the saintly bishop, with florid face and ample girth, made flattering references to the noble and happy pair united that morning in the holy



bonds of matrimony, Lord Pompey tittered, and in a loud tone shrewdly remarked to himself, "Gad, he'll expect a handsome fee ; deuce take him if he don't," to the evident discomfort of his lordship and the amusement of his hearers.

Throughout the feast Lady Pompey's heart beat high with exalted satisfaction and gratified pride. She had secured the distinction ardently sought ; the duke had graciously given her the tips of his trembling fingers to shake, and congratulated her on the alliance with his brother ; whilst the duchess had condescended to inquire the nationality of her cook who served the repast. Had the Italian *chef* been a slave, Lady Pompey would have given him to her grace on the spot, but being a free man and a great artist, he expected a liberal salary, and the duchess, as the world knew, was penurious.

Presently the happy bride and bridegroom drove away to one of the duke's country residences, where they were to spend their honeymoon, whilst congratulations savouring of that delightful exhilaration begotten by champagne rang in their ears. Then the merry guests who had taken part in this interesting farce went their divers ways, gratified that their dear friends and kind hosts, Lord and Lady Pompey Rokeway, had by this marriage afforded them subject for laughter and ridicule which must at least last nine days.

From the ducal residence Lord and Lady Pompey proceeded to the continent, where they resolved to spend the winter and early spring.

Meanwhile the last months of the year had for Philip Amerton worn away with a sense of undefined fear and sombre uneasiness he could neither fathom nor dissipate. So far as he might judge by outward signs, no storm threatened his peace ; yet a depression, vague, subtle, and untraceable, gradually crept over his mind and weighted his life. There had been times in the past



when he had known dejection, but reaction had duly followed. Now, however, this nameless care deepened with every hour. He felt as one travelling a lone and unknown path through profound darkness, fearful of some impending peril and conscious of utter helplessness.

Weeks passed, but no rift appeared in the cloud; one heavy day followed another, and merged into fateful blackness, as evening into night. From the depths of his soul he cried aloud, praying he might be freed from this weird, horrible, and dream-like spell, but his words were lost in chaos and gained no response. Now, indeed, did he seem as one apart from his fellow-men; as little bound to the interests they shared, as slightly influenced by motives they obeyed, as if he had already passed the portals of death and walked a bloodless phantom in their midst. The old sense of weary loneliness and unbridged isolation deepened; the link which should have bound him to humanity was missing; he could never take hands with his kind and feel as they.

Perfect indifference to all things paralyzed his feelings; his heart was frozen as if grasped by death, and its chillness spread through his veins. The while, as light reflected through colour, his work assumed the tints of his mind, and the chapters he at this time wrote were marked by a gloom and horror afterwards long remembered. And, as in his organization matter was subject to mind, his health gradually gave way. His wife had noted the change, but seemed powerless to hinder its effects. Now, indeed, more than ever did they seem estranged. He shrank within himself, and his personality seemed numbed by the depression overhanging him.

Awakened to a sense of danger by the scene through which she had passed with Colonel Tarbert, and grateful



for her escape from dire temptation, Miriam had striven hardly to be a faithful wife, and in a thousand ways had pleaded for her husband's love. But though his words were ever gentle, some barrier she felt powerless to overthrow and unable to withstand effectually parted them. And her natural affections being beaten back upon her heart, as waves dashing against rocks are flung into the sea, she sorrowfully concluded Philip loved her no more, and it was true indeed she had become a burden to his life.

Then her thoughts turned to the man who had ever exercised an influence over one part of her nature, and that not the highest, and her peril became great. The gloom that had gradually and perceptibly fallen upon her husband had likewise its influence upon her. Failing as utterly to divert its descent as if she strove to waft darkness from the face of the earth, she slowly succumbed to its influence.

Yet the depression affected both in divers ways. To him its cause was unknown. Occasionally he regarded it as the shadow of an approaching ordeal in the path he had elected to tread, but no certainty of this was manifest to him, Benoni being at this time absent from England. Miriam conceived his gloom the outcome of sorrow and weariness through having taken her as his wife. She had gleaned sufficient knowledge regarding the mystic life to become aware marriage was regarded as a hindrance to adeptship, and she no longer doubted this was the existence her husband wished to embrace. All that was highest and best in her nature still clung to him, but with Colonel Tarbert beside her the lower elements of her character triumphed, and sore danger threatened her. Therefore was she downcast.

And so this period of their lives was spent by both in mental darkness, and weariness of sombre days, and dread of what the future yet might hold.



Philip remembered that formerly when depression fell upon him, he had taken exercise by way of dispelling its effects. The weather being wet and dreary, had not recently permitted him to try this experiment, but one morning in December, the sun being bright and the atmosphere clear, he resolved to start for a long walk. At breakfast he announced his intention of going to Wimbledon.

"I shall tramp to Old Wandsworth and have lunch at the Spread Eagle," he said, "and afterwards journey to Wimbledon Common, and remain there until sunset."

Miriam drew a short quick breath, and put her hand to her side, as if his words contained tidings of momentous importance.

"Must you go to-day?" she asked.

He looked at her across the table, with that weary expression she knew so well resting in his eyes.

"No," he answered, "not if you have made any plans requiring me to remain. Have you asked any one to lunch?"

"No," she replied.

"Then I shall go, for the morning is bright and the day will be favourable for a long walk."

There was no thought of her in his arrangements, she considered; in small things as in great, she had no place in his life.

"What do you intend doing to-day?" he asked presently.

"I shall call on Gal Alex in the afternoon," she said, looking down. "It is her day. She has asked me to dine with her quietly afterwards, but I have refused."

"It had been better if you accepted her invitation, because it will be uncertain when I get back. You need not stand on ceremony with so old a friend; stay to dinner with her, and on my return from Wimbledon



"I shall dine at the Garrick. You will not feel lonely whilst I am away?"

"No," she answered, in a low voice, bending over her cup.

"I fear you sometimes are, even when I am at home."

"Sometimes."

"But you know men must work."

"Yes, and women must weep."

He looked at her quickly and keenly, striving to discover if she meant what she said. She met his glance with flushed cheeks and a faint smile.

"But you don't weep?" he said, in that tone which was wont to thrill her in olden days.

"No," she replied, shaking her head; "I only quoted, like a parrot."

He looked out of the opposite window thinking of her words and the tone in which they were uttered, wondering if she merely spoke at random or really felt the force of her remark. The question abided with and puzzled him all day.

He continued absorbed during the remainder of the meal; and she likewise maintained silence, but watched him narrowly. And ever and anon her face flushed and paled, and she became restless from great nervousness. Occasionally it seemed as if she struggled to speak; anon she was lost in thought, whilst her head rested on her hand; and evidently she pictured some scene, for suddenly, with a low cry that surprised herself, she cried out:

"Philip!"

He started and said irritably, "What is the matter?"

"Nothing," she replied, attempting to laugh; "I think I must have been dreaming. And now I forget what I was about to say," she added hurriedly. "Oh, this is it; what time shall you be back?"



"About six or seven, I suppose," he answered, rising from the table.

She watched his movements until he left the room. When he had put on his boots and got his hat and stick he came back, and glancing at her where she still sat before her untasted breakfast, said carelessly:

"Now I'm off; good morning."

"Philip," she said, rising up and holding out her hand.

He crossed the room and kissed her forehead.

She listened to his footsteps in the hall, and then descending the stone steps leading to the road, and suddenly hurried to the window. He caught sight of her and lightly waved his hand.

And she remembered the look in his eyes many days.

The brightness of the sun and keenness of the morning air at first had little effect in rousing his spirits from languor. For once he failed to reflect nature's mood, and the contrast of external light and vigour made him more conscious of his internal darkness and depression. By the time he had lunched at Old Wandsworth and reached the Common it was two o'clock.

The wide open plain, with its far-stretching view bounded by the Surrey hills, brought him a sense of space and freedom that produced speedy relief. Had he been parted by fifty leagues from London he could not be more solitary.

Here he felt man might pour out the secrets and oppressions of his heart to his Creator, unseen, unheard, save by the whole court of Heaven. Some sense of peace, as if escape from his kind were well, filled his mind. Hours and seasons there are in most men's lives when, humanity becoming burdensome, they would fain escape its reach; when companionship



growing irksome, solitude becomes a necessity. A longing rises within to step from the crowd, and, seeking loneliness, reverently stand face to face with nature. At such times the worthlessness and barrenness of existence; the strange pathos, futile joys, petty ambitions, tawdry triumphs, bitter griefs, sordid cares, and many errors of daily life; the emptiness of all things lying beneath gilded surfaces; the infinite possibilities of man's soul; the wonderment of what has been and what may be; vague speculations as to cause and effect; vain yearnings for clearer sight and fuller knowledge; dim consciousness of light behind the veil, flash upon the mind, leaving the thinker a man of sadder mind and humbler mien. The influence of such considerations of old sent hermits into deserts, nay, yet fills monasteries with weary-hearted men.

Such ideas flitting through his mind soothed Amerton by relieving him from his immediate sense of depression and placing him in the wider arena of considerations that had perplexed and troubled thoughtful men of every generation. Then by degrees his natural perception of all things beautiful awoke. The wide undulating common, with its patches of heather and grass, islands of gorse and clumps of trees, became the background of a series of living pictures that passed before him as he rested on a wooden bench.

Away in the distance a boy with a colley dog slowly rose on the horizon, at first as mere specks against the blue, gradually gaining due proportions as they drew near. The boy's cheeks glowed with exercise, his eyes shone with health, the fresh wind rushed through his hair. Between him and the dog friendliest relations existed; the one spoke, the other obeyed; both ran and gambolled in joyous fellowship, and passed out of Amerton's sight. Next came in view a young horse-



woman, whose rounded, graceful figure was well defined against the strong light. Her horse reared capriciously, as if he would enjoy sport with his rider, who, bending over him, patted his neck and chided him. And she, galloping into distance, gave place to a solitary male figure in flannels, deep chested and broad shouldered as Hercules, light-footed and swift sped as Hermes, who rushed across the common scattering pieces of paper as he fled; to be presently pursued by a cloud of flying followers in coloured shirts, wordless, fleet-footed, strong-limbed, athletic, keeping well abreast, and crossing the plain noiselessly as a flock of birds winging their way through air. Beyond, red-coated hurlers moved to and fro, making bright patches on the green. Hearing volunteers practise rifle shooting, Philip went forward to watch them; and then strode further onwards, till soon fell the evening of this brief day.

Above the hazy blue of the Surrey hills, the sky was flushed with scarlet light, that gradually deepening to crimson slowly faded to gold. Then came broad lines of tender green, changing to grey, and presently merging into shadow. Amerton turned to retrace his steps, but paused when he had reached some distance, and looked back.

Where the sun had set, great perpendicular beams of light shot into the darkening sky. Seen from this desolate common, with night gathering round him, they seemed to Philip as vengeful fingers of a giant hand stretched out of heaven. The thought distressed and disturbed him, and as he turned to pursue his homeward course, the now deserted common bore a sad, forlorn aspect. The patches of heath, gorse, and grass had turned to blackness, seeming to stain the wholesome earth, like plague-spots on the world. The bark of a dog in the distance sounded menacing to his ears,



and the wind sighing through the bare branches of a blighted tree, moaned with the tones of a human voice.

He had lingered too long, and now the sky was covered by unbroken darkness. An uncanny feeling seized possession of him, as if the bleak common were peopled with forms he could not behold; and more than once he glanced behind in part belief some weird and fleshless procession of mocking fiends followed his path. As he strode rapidly forward the spirit of night walked with him. The black air sweeping past whispered words of strange import in his ears. A clump of shrubs dimly perceived at some distance appeared like distorted crouching figures of half human creation, that on his approach changed to twisted boughs and leafless brambles. Fears having no part in physical dread, assailed him. The uneven surface of the common over which he trod seemed as the mounds of new-made graves; and the fluttering upwards of birds his footsteps disturbed, were to his fancy as a flight of souls on whose sacred rest he had intruded. Once a dead leaf helplessly whirled in air struck his cheek; he felt as if the withered finger of a skeleton hand thrust forward through darkness had touched him.

He had now lost his way, but believed if he pushed onward in a straight line he must gain the high road. He therefore hastened his steps, but the long twisted grass impeded him; briars stretched forward and clung to his arms; the sad babbling of a little brook, crying because of its loneliness, implored him to stay. No sound of human life greeted his ears. The space which before had been wide, was now boundless, all traces of circumference being lost in universal blackness. And above other terrors of which these things seemed but a part, was an apprehension of unknown



calamity. It was a blessed relief when, after great weariness, he found himself on the high road, within hail of humanity.

He was far too nervous and exhausted to seek his club and endure the conversation of acquaintances he might meet, and therefore turned homewards. The servant who opened the door looked at him curiously, but he passed in without heeding her. On inquiring if his wife had returned, he was told she had not; he then ordered dinner, believing she was dining with Gal Alex.

Having finished his solitary meal, he entered the study: the lamp was already lighted; taking up a book he sat down at his desk. As he did he saw a letter lying there, bearing his name in his wife's writing. Supposing she wished him to call for her at Gal Alex's, or leave some other message, he opened the envelope and proceeded to scan its inclosure, but he had not read the first sentence when he laid it down again, brushed his hand across his eyes as if believing they deceived him, and then continued.

"Philip," the letter began, "I am going to inflict on you what may at first sight seem a wrong, but time will show it is best for both of us. It has been clear to me for many months you made a mistake in marrying me, that I have become a weight on your life, a hindrance to your purposes. I too have committed an error in wedding you. I am wholly incapable of making you happy, and I have at times been terribly miserable. Why should we endure for ever a bond that has become irksome to both. A little courage and it is broken beyond repair. I take the step which parts us, for I am about to seek happiness with one who wished to make me his wife before I agreed to become yours. The law will right you, and then you will be free. We may never meet again. If this act of mine gives



you pain at first, forgive me. It is taken to further our future peace.—Miriam.”

He laid down the letter, feeling stunned; his confused senses were as yet unable to grasp the full meaning of her words. Was it possible she who of all women held his faith and trust, she who once won his heart, whom still he loved, had now cast shame and dishonour on him? He crushed the note in his hand and flung it from him wrathfully; if a mere effort of will could have achieved his desire, he would then have torn all memory of her from his life.

But a few hours ago she had spoken gentle words to him, raised her face to receive his kiss, whilst the resolution to dishonour him lay in her heart. In a moment he had fallen from the heights of faith in womanhood down an abyss of bitter shame, and lay helplessly crushed, powerless to act or think coherently. She who had once made the world glad to his sight had wrecked his life, she whom he had chosen as his dearest friend had proved his bitterest foe. The disgrace of her act smote him deeply; he wished he had never seen her, and swore he would never look on her again.

Then it flashed upon him for the first time there was a partner in this act more guilty than she. At thought of this the blood ran hot in Amerton's veins, and evil thoughts swept through his mind as dark clouds crossing a winter sky. This man it was who had tempted her, stolen her from her home, and repent how he might the wrong he inflicted could never be set right. Why should such men be permitted to live and wreck the lives of those around them? He would seek Colonel Tarbert and take revenge; the world was too small for both, one of them must die.

Then by a reaction of feeling he thought—no longer with bitterness and pain, but with sorrow and com-



passion—of her who was still his wife, for a question rose spectre-like from the confusion of his mind, and confronted him appallingly. Had he, her husband, done his duty by her? He could not answer as his heart desired, and he bowed his head in reproach and humiliation. He had sworn to love, cherish and protect her, but how had he kept his vow? He had regretted his marriage, and grown weary of his wife; whilst striving for what lay beyond his reach, he had neglected that most concerning him; whilst gazing at the stars his feet had strayed into a morass. He had taken the love and devotion she offered him as if they had been merely his due, and the first weeks of his ardour having passed made her little return in kind. His promises had proved but empty words; surely the whole chivalry of his nature had fallen from him.

There were days, he remembered with keen reproach, when wholly absorbed in work, or lost in occult speculations, he had scarcely spoken to or heeded her. She had ceased to occupy any part of his life, to hold her proper place in his heart. He had not acted as her guide or counsellor, but assuming she was happy without troubling to ascertain if she was content, had taken his selfish solitary way through weeks and months, suffering her companionship rather than cherishing her love.

If she had failed to understand his nature, sympathize with his moods, enter into his feelings, surely that was due to some lack in her mental organization, which he should have accepted as a blemish rather than resented as a fault. She must have known he had wearied of her, have felt he had repented his marriage. She had loved him once, of that nothing could dissuade him; and remembering her words to-day and the light in her eyes he could not but think some



traces of her past affection lingered with her still. Had he but known his last kiss was to her the sign of farewell, what misery had both been spared.

He thought of the loneliness she must have endured, the pain his neglect caused her, the humiliation of considering herself a burden to him, the temptation which freedom and life with one who professed to love her must have offered. The fault of her elopement was solely his own; he had failed in his duty, and punishment had overtaken him. No feeling of bitterness towards her now rested in his mind; only compassion for her, and self-reproach. And as he sat there, thoughts of bygone days and memories of early love thronged around his desolate heart like winds that rush through open doors of drear deserted homes. He buried his head in his arms outstretched upon the desk, being weary with grief and torn with remorse.

Then, as time passed, he conceived a resolution of seeking his wife, and never resting until he had brought her back to his home, which yet was hers. She had said the law would right him, but to his mind no man had power to sever the spiritual union binding them in bonds enduring through all time. The step she had taken could never be repaired, but he would rescue her from the life into which wrong and temptation had first led her. Her sin was insufficient to cast her from his home, for had he done his duty by her she had not erred. He never doubted she would return to him, and there and then resolved to devote his life to her. He would protect her from the sneers and cavils of the world, from the misery awaiting her. He would begin his search for her at once.

Suddenly he thought of Benoni: perhaps he could help him; he had been absent from town some months, but might have returned as suddenly as he had departed. And with remembrance of Benoni came a



fresh train of thoughts. It was whilst following the teachings of the mystic this misery had crept into his life. True, he had embraced them voluntarily, and had been warned his search into mysticism would involve him in troubles that should test his strength; but he had not dreamt his sorrow could proceed from such a source.

Benoni must have perceived its coming, and yet had given him no word of warning, had not forefended him from dishonour. Amerton was sick at heart; torn by divers feelings, he knew not what to think. Was this grief but part of a fate destined to befall him from his entrance into life? Was it an experience necessary to a mission he was bound to fulfil? Whilst his wife was with him he had not valued her; now, being gone, he mourned her. Was he indeed but as a child with a toy, nay, was he himself but a plaything in the hands of an incomprehensible fate?

Summoning the servant, Philip learned his wife had left the house at midday, taking a box with her. The maid had not heard any directions given to the cabman; her mistress, in departing, merely said she had left a letter in the study.

He scarce knew in which direction to begin his search. A faint hope rose in his mind that Benoni would in some way aid him—nay, might even still save him from dishonour and grief by exerting his powers to prevent Miriam's flight. If after all she was rescued and restored to him, how grateful he should feel. He would take this lesson to heart and henceforth live not for himself alone, but for her likewise.

Busy with these thoughts, he hurriedly left the house, and getting into a cab drove to Benoni's residence. His vivid imagination had seized hold of this hope for her delivery, and by the time he reached his destination he persuaded himself he should find his



wife safe in the mystic's home. The first sight of the bleak and lonely house, silent and dark, dissipated his expectations. Jumping from his cab, he rang the gate bell violently, so that the peal clamoured noisily through the quiet night. When the last toll died away, unbroken silence fell upon him oppressively. The tall poplar trees, like giant hearse plumes, waved slowly and sadly within the forlorn garden: the curtainless windows glared on him pitilessly. No lights moved within, no sound reached his ear. Unwilling to depart without ascertaining if Benoni had returned, he rang a second time, and again the bell woke many echoes through the dismal mansion. The waiting cabdriver looked critically at Amerton, and from him to the house, folded his arms, settled a rug round his knees, and resigned himself to the situation.

For the third time Philip rang, on this occasion with violence begotten of impatience, and then to his unspeakable relief, heard some noise within. Bolts were slowly withdrawn, and a heavy door creaked. Amerton's heart beat with expectancy as the sound of footsteps echoed on the flagged pathway leading to the gate. When this was unlocked and thrown open, he beheld the figure of a charwoman. Holding up the lantern she carried to inspect her visitor, its light fell upon her wrinkled face, and was reflected in her dark eyes shaded by wiry brows; bushy grey hair escaped from her cap; her back was bent from age or infirmity. She had evidently been roused from sleep, and her expression was not of the most perfect amiability.

Silently and grimly she stared at Amerton, waiting for him to speak.

"Is Benoni at home?" he asked in a tone tremulous from anticipated disappointment.

"No, he hasn't been here these three months.

"When do you expect him back?"



"It's more than I can say."

"Do you know where he is at present?"

"No. I don't know nothing of him," she answered, lowering the lantern and making a movement by way of indicating her desire the interview should end.

"Good-night," said Amerton, turning away sadly.

"Is that all?" replied the woman; whereon he turned back and put some silver in her outstretched hand.

He went back to his cab.

"Scotland Yard," he said in a troubled voice to the driver.

"Something's up," that individual muttered to himself, and away they sped.

Arriving at their destination, Amerton presented his card and asked to see Inspector Collins, an officer for whose sagacity he entertained the highest respect. Being promptly shown into an office Mr. Collins presently entered, and being familiar with Amerton's name as a writer, regarded him with some curiosity. Philip explained that a lady in whose movements he was interested had left her home to elope with a military man.

The officer looking at him asked if the lady were a friend of his.

"She is my wife," he answered.

The words were easily spoken, but the pain and humiliation they caused wrung his heart.

"I must ask you to describe both parties," said the inspector, taking a book from his pocket preparatory to making notes.

Philip did as requested in a few graphic sentences.

"I merely wish to find some clue to where they have gone," he said.

"Yes, sir; we must trace them, and then it will be an easy matter to get witnesses for the case."



"I don't want witnesses," replied Amerton.

"No?" said the officer regarding him with evident surprise.

"No. I intend to follow them."

The idea of a duel in a foreign country, fought by an outraged husband and the man who had injured him, presented itself to the inspector's mind. He lay back in his chair, drummed his fingers on his chin, and said thoughtfully :

"Better leave the matter in our hands altogether, sir. It will be more satisfactory."

"No," answered Philip, "this is no ordinary case."

"That's what they all say," Mr. Collins remarked philosophically.

"They?"

"All husbands who come here; but after all we find one case much the same as another; but to every man his own misfortune seems the worst—that is if it happens to him for the first time."

Amerton rose; the experiences of a detective officer were not calculated to raise his views of humanity.

"I have reasons," he said, "for wishing to find and follow my wife. I shall thank you to let me know immediately you have found some clue to her route."

"Rely on it, we'll do the best we can for you, sir. I shall call on you the minute I have any news to communicate."

Philip thanked him, took up his hat and departed. As he walked towards Charing Cross he saw Ulic Tarbert advancing with an absorbed air. He did not notice Amerton until the latter stood before him. That Ulic's cousin had dealt Philip the greatest wrong possible, was no reason it should be resented on one who was innocent. Amerton shook hands with him.

"Were you looking for me?" he asked.

"No," answered Ulic. Then observing his friend's



face, he added, "Has anything happened—you look quite ill."

"Something painful—unspeakably painful has occurred to me."

"Nothing very serious I hope."

"My wife has left me."

"Left you for good?"

"Yes, eloped."

"Good heavens," he exclaimed—then added, "not with——" and paused.

"With Colonel Tarbert, yes."

"The scoundrel," said Ulic.

And then in silence he took Amerton's arm, and walked part of the way with him towards his deserted home.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### LORD KERRY CONVERSES.

DURING the forenoon of the day on which Mrs. Philip Amerton left her husband's house, Ulic Tarbert called by appointment on his cousin Lord Kerry. Instead of spending the winter abroad as usual, the earl remained in town, occupying the family mansion, a dark and cumbrous building situated in Lowndes Square. Entering this old and gloomy dwelling with its spacious marble hall and wide oak staircase, hung with family portraits, Ulic felt as if he had stepped into past ages.

Between the present Lord Kerry and Ulic a warm friendship had ever existed, principally sustained by correspondence and perhaps the more firmly established from lack of continual intercourse. The healthy frankness and honest simplicity of Ulic's nature were fully appreciated by Lord Kerry; whom, on the other hand,



his cousin admired for his brilliancy and worth. In the last century my lord would have been described in the ponderous dedications of humble scribes, as a man of parts. He had penned sonnets and composed songs, written a novel and contributed tales to magazines, knew the merits of a picture at a glance, was an excellent photographer and a skilled musician. He would readily have gained distinction in some branch of art had his health permitted the application necessary to the achievement of success.

His sympathy with distress was practically expressed by munificent gifts to charities, especially to hospitals treating the disease from which he suffered; the poor ever found in him a helpful friend. The whole aim and object of his existence since his entrance into manhood's estate, was to acquire perfect health. Soon after his coming of age a painful spinal disease rendered him a helpless invalid for years; from which time the preservation of his life had become the study of his days. He had therefore visited renowned physicians in many countries; drank the waters of famous springs; tried the effects of various climes with some beneficial effect. But the fear of a malady from which he never wholly recovered was for ever before him, a dark curtain shutting enjoyment from life.

To have health he would have given the last penny he possessed, but that he desired most was not his. Like humanity at large, he was therefore dissatisfied with his lot; and whilst clinging to it tenaciously longed to exchange it ardently.

When Ulic entered the room known as the little library, he found his cousin lying on a sofa; cushions supported his back, a rug covered his legs, and a portable book-stand beside him held a novel which he skimmed. A mass of red brown hair and a thick auburn beard threw the pallor of his face into sharper contrast;



under a broad forehead, large luminous eyes burned vividly; his features were sharpened by illness, their expression saddened by thought.

"Ah, Ulic," he said, moving aside the bookstand and stretching out his hands, "it is weeks since we have met."

"We have both been in town," replied Ulic, as if he would intimate his presence might be sought if required.

"So we have," replied Lord Kerry; "and probably it's because we are within hailing distance we remain apart. But this must not be in future. Bring your chair here and sit near me."

"You are better to-day?"

"I am. You know that because you see me in good spirits."

"Yes; I noticed you were more cheerful than usual."

"I am always brighter when I am well. I think it must be easy for those who are healthful to be happy; and being happy, to love their kind. And yet they don't; do they, Ulic?"

"I greatly fear they don't."

"Now, if I were perfectly strong, instead of blood, the milk of human kindness would flow through my veins," he said, pathetically.

"No doubt. I believe it's those who suffer and sorrow feel deepest for their race; pain, either physical or mental, becomes the one touch of nature that makes them kin with misery."

Lord Kerry looked at him keenly.

"I dare say," he replied, "your words are true. But do you think if by some miracle I were made whole, given again the free use of my limbs, the full strength of my body—only think of it, Ulic—that in a couple of months I should become so used to my new con-



dition, and therefore so indifferent to its blessings, that I would forget the poor cripples all over the land who lie helpless in their beds, peopling the wards of hospitals or exciting the tender care of homes."

"No. Once you had experience of their state, you would probably ever after compassionate them. Only those who suffer can realize pain, and through this medium feel for its victims; just as it is only sinners who are merciful, because knowing the temptation and bitterness of sin."

Lord Kerry put one hand on his cousin's shoulder, and said:

"What has happened to you?"

The younger man felt his cheeks grow red, but he promptly made reply:

"Nothing."

Lord Kerry withdrew his hand suddenly, feeling he had not been answered.

"When I lived in Italy," he said, "and felt the warm sunshine on my face, looked into the cloudless sky, and inhaled the balmy air, I felt it was a tragic thing a man should feel pain or grief whilst the world remained so fair. You in some way bring this memory back to me. It is pathetic to hear you, who should rejoice in the brightness of happy youth, talk of sin, sorrow, and suffering. For you such knowledge should not be; the dew of your young years should be fresh upon you; the morning sunshine of your life should know no shadow. What is your age?"

"Twenty-five."

"And I am more than ten years your senior. You should rejoice, for now have you reached the most delightful period of your days. You are still young and unwearied; dreams of what may be visit your waking hours; the infinite possibilities of life stretch before you, like pathways from an unknown valley lead-



ing upwards to unsuspected heights : and you are yet removed by ten golden years from the half-way house of existence, gaining which, man pauses on the hill, and looks back upon the pleasant ways he has traversed, loth to continue the forward journey towards mist and cloud descending on his path."

"You are a poet."

"And it is we who would teach mankind, but they will not hear."

"One of your tribe says we must count time by heart-throbs."

"And he is right. But then, has your heart throbbed unduly?" Lord Kerry asked, looking at him with an expression betraying not only interest but amusement.

"It has," answered Ulic simply and honestly.

Lord Kerry sat up and gazed at him, this time quite seriously :

"Fate has not dealt with you according to your desires?" he said.

"No. I cannot tell you the whole story."

"Be that as you please; but, my kinsman, there is one question I would ask, and I must be answered freely and without reserve," he added firmly, yet kindly.

Ulic looked serious :

"What is it?" he asked.

"Tell me if the course of your true love has been set aside for lack of such a materialistic consideration as gold? For if so, I must——"

"You are a good fellow, Kerry, and I shall never forget this; but my disappointment has no concern with money. If want of wealth were the only hindrance I should work incessantly, do wonders to obtain my ends, but I am powerless to break the barrier parting me from happiness."



"Is there no one who can help you to contentment?"

"No one," answered Ulic dejectedly.

"You are certain of this?" Lord Kerry asked.

"Beyond all doubt," he replied sadly.

"And I daresay you feel miserable, my poor boy?"

"I am unhappy."

"And yet to be five-and-twenty and glow with health, and be in love; ah, what a blissful condition yours would seem to others. Surely, no man knows when he is happy."

The pathos of this speech appealed to Ulic forcibly. It struck him his grief was selfish, and he felt abashed. There was silence in the room for some seconds, each man being engaged by his own thoughts. This was at last broken by Lord Kerry, who, awaking from a reverie, exclaimed:

"Ah, what would I not give to be young and well."

"Luncheon, my lord," responded the butler.

At the same instant a valet entered the room, removed the rug, and handed the invalid a stick.

"Will you not take my arm," said Ulic.

"You are very kind," answered Lord Kerry, and they went towards the adjoining apartment, now used as a dining-room. The sun shining through the coloured glass of a deep bay window flung rich and rosy lights upon the Persian carpet and the white damask of the table. A wood fire burned upon the broad open hearth, above which a chimney-piece of carved oak, black with time, rose to the richly embossed ceiling. Tapestry covered the walls.

"Tell me, Ulic," said Lord Kerry, when they had almost finished luncheon and were therefore inclined for conversation; "tell me of the world; enlighten me regarding society. Who are now its lions, who its beauties? What man in your set talks best, what woman scandalizes most? You are, I'm sure, just now



in the mood to describe it vividly; the zest of life will give fluency to your words, whilst your disappointment will give piquant bitterness to your pictures. And I am in the humour to hear, for you share my solitude for an hour, and this nectar, known to prosaic mortals as champagne, warms my veins."

"What can I tell you?" asked Ulic.

"Any news from a land we once knew is interesting. Remember I only realize society exists from hearing it whirl past my doors late at night and early in the morning. There is no longer room for me within its charmed circle, for pleasure never makes place for pain."

"Some day you will be all right, and go back again."

"We will postpone the consideration," he answered with a wan smile; then added quickly, with an effort to overtake the light tone in which he had first spoken: "you haven't answered my questions. Is society still beset by the magnificent man who kills women by a glance? Does the elderly youth who is overwhelmed by the number of his conquests, the matron anxious to dispose of her daughters, the sycophant who smiles at all above and frowns at all below her social level, the good-natured bore who tells foolish stories, the young lady who is disdainful because it suits her black brows, the damsel who lives with her head over one shoulder to exhibit her well cut profile, the pleasant fellow without an income who gives good dinners and plays cards, the stout man who rants, and the thin man who simpers—do they all hold their places as of yore?"

"All," replied Ulic; "I suppose they are types endowed with eternal vitality."

"Aye, there is the pity of it, boy."

"I don't know that it is; they amuse each other and instruct their spectators."

"Perhaps you are right. They are all on a mental



level, and desire no better company than themselves. Each is filled with the importance of his own petty purposes, futile aims, mean ambitions, pitiful desires, beside which the world at large, brimful of bitter wrongs and desperate sadness and woeful tragedies, is as nought. Powdered, perfumed, painted, gay buffoons in brave apparel, they gambol and play with life as jugglers with double-edged daggers; mouth and leer at each other, crackle and cajole in feigned gaiety or honest idiotcy, making pretence of all they are not. Verily, they are a motley crowd, with here and there a giant in their midst, or a poet sad-eyed and sober because he has strayed from dreams of heroes, and finds himself in the company of fools. Come, we will have our coffee and cigarettes in the library."

They returned in silence. Lord Kerry lay back wearily on the sofa.

"You are fatigued," said Ulic, "because you have excited yourself in talking over-much."

"I am tired," he replied, a sudden change occurring in his mood; "but I am always tired. I suppose I shall rest well one day soon. Nay, forgive me, Ulic, I should not have said this before you; I didn't ask you to visit me that you might hear sad things, my cousin."

"Let me read to you a little, it may help to quiet you."

"Not to-day. Apart from the pleasure of seeing you, which is great, I want to consult you on a matter that has given me uneasiness."

"I hope I may be able to assist you."

"Thanks; your common sense, I have no doubt, will help me. But even if that be powerless to aid, I shall have made a confession that will ease my mind."

"You may place every confidence in me," said Ulic.

"I know that well." Then after a second Lord



Kerry asked: "When did you last see my brother Bob?"

"A week ago, at the club."

"It is concerning him I wish to speak. Do you know anything of his financial affairs?"

"Nothing; he has never mentioned them to me. We are little more than acquaintances, certainly we have never been friends, and are not likely to exchange confidences."

"As you know," said Lord Kerry, "I don't communicate with him. We have never had two ideas in common, or entertained the slightest affection towards each other. He went his way, I mine. The fact of his being my brother didn't necessitate our living under one roof, nor yet in one continent; the world is large. As you are likewise aware, my father was not latterly on the best terms with him. He had twice paid Bob's debts, but repeatedly refused to increase his income. He considered him extravagant, and was enraged against him some years ago on learning through our solicitor of some transactions which Bob, speculating on his father's death and mine, had with the Jews. However, you will do me the justice of believing I never interfered between them."

"Certainly," replied Ulic.

"Very well; now comes the point which troubles me. A week after my return from Italy, my father casually remarked, one night, he had received a letter from Bob, stating he was again involved in debt, and requesting the sum of three thousand pounds. I asked if he had sent the money, and he replied determinedly he had not, nor should he, and spoke strongly on the subject. Seeing the matter irritated him, I did not again refer to it, nor did he. It therefore completely passed from my mind until a fortnight ago, when looking over my banker's account I saw a cheque for five



thousand pounds had been paid to Bob. Much surprised at this I turned to my father's diary, believing I should find some entry there, showing he had changed his mind with regard to paying Bob's debts. There was no such memorandum in the book. The receipt of his application was recorded, and two days later a line ran 'Wrote to my son Robert refusing his demand.'"

"I suppose," said Ulic, "he subsequently altered his mind and sent the money, though forgetting to record it in his diary."

"I had come to that conclusion when it struck me I would look at the cheque and see when it was drawn. My bankers sent it me. It was dated a day when my father, being seriously ill, never left his bed; it was cashed on the second morning succeeding his death."

"That is singular," said Ulic, who in blank perplexity stared at the wall above Lord Kerry's head.

"But more singular still, in the wording and signature of the cheque I cannot quite identify my father's writing."

"Then," said Ulic starting, "you suspect it to be a ——" and he paused.

"A forgery," replied his cousin, supplying the word.

"This is terrible."

Both men looked at each other in silence for some seconds.

"In the top drawer at the right hand side of that es-critoire you will find an envelope, please hand it to me."

When it was given him he took out a cheque and passed it to Ulic. "Now," he said, "examine it carefully, and say if you agree with my opinion."

Ulic carried it to the window, and observed the writing closely and critically.

"If it is not your father's handwriting," he remarked, after the lapse of a couple of minutes, "it is the most wonderful imitation imaginable."



"You are right; but the more I look at it, the more I am convinced my father never wrote it. No one was more familiar with his penmanship than I, and therefore no one is better able to pronounce an opinion concerning its authenticity. At first sight I believed the cheque was in his writing; on a second inspection, I changed my mind. Look at it again and you will see any marked characteristics are carefully imitated; but letters devoid of individuality are not so accurately followed. For instance, look at the word 'five.' My father always formed his F by making a single down-stroke, and crossing it half way: this is done here, but then the remaining letters in the word, affording less grasp of character, are without a certain subtle formation that would distinctly mark them as his to one accustomed to his writing. Of course the variety of a man's caligraphy, caused by using a steel or quill pen, by writing in sun or candle-light, when calm or agitated, must be taken into consideration. Yet I feel assured the cheque was never written by my father."

"That is a serious conclusion," replied Ulic, taking his place beside Lord Kerry.

"I know it is. I haven't mentioned my suspicions to any one, save you; not even to my solicitors, whose advice, perhaps, I should take; nor to my bankers whom I should put on their guard; for the hand which so skilfully imitated my father's writing could also forge my name."

"Then," said Ulic, "believing it a forgery, you have no doubt regarding the guilty party."

"Common sense points to my brother as the culprit. He received the money; either he or an accomplice drew the cheque."

"I cannot say I have ever entertained a high opinion of his honour."

"I greatly fear he never had any."



"What is best to be done?"

"That is a consideration that has disturbed me greatly. It is not the money I so much regret, but the meanness of the theft. It grieved me to think Bob could be guilty of this deed."

"Perhaps he is not."

"I sincerely wish I could believe him innocent."

"Do you purpose taking any steps in the matter, or will you let it be?"

"Whilst suspicion amounting to conviction rests in my mind, it would be unfair to my brother if I didn't give him an opportunity of proving his innocence."

"You are right."

"Therefore, Ulic, I want you to do me a service."

"With all my heart it shall be done,"

"Will you call on Bob, see him privately, tell him I have found a cheque for five thousand pounds drawn in his favour and bearing my father's signature, which I believe to be a forgery? Mark his face the while. Make no mention of my father's diary, but ask him if he can offer any explanations that will help to remove my opinion. If he is innocent, as I heartily hope he be, then he will state under what circumstances he became possessed of the cheque, and how my father came to change his mind. If not, it will show him I am on my guard, and prevent him attempting another forgery."

"I shall carry out your instructions as best I can."

"I would ask him here, and state my suspicions to him, but a certain restraint exists between us which might prevent his being communicative to me. I haven't seen him since my father's death, nor for years before that event. At my father's written request, I have not increased Bob's annuity; perhaps he expected I should, but under the circumstances I cannot."



"I perfectly agree with you."

"Do you happen to know any of his associates?"

"So far as I can see he has no intimate friends, though having a large circle of acquaintances."

"He must have friends for all that; and if he doesn't wear them on his sleeve, it's because they are not presentable. And amongst them must be his accomplice, for I believe he would not be able to imitate his father's writing so cleverly. Keep your eyes open, my dear Ulic, and see if Bob knows any man whose character will not bear the light of day. And now adieu, I'm tired. Come and see me soon again," he concluded, lying back wearily on his cushions.

"I certainly shall."

"Come in the morning with brightness and sunshine as your meet attendants. You exhale mental and physical health, and are good for weary eyes to gaze on. Yes, come in the forenoon, for I am always at my best in the early part of day, but as it wanes I grow exhausted. I believe my life will fade out with the light some evening, then will come darkness and rest."

"No, no," replied Ulic, looking down at him compassionately; "not darkness and rest, but happiness and light."

"If I could feel assured of that," he said sadly.

"You will one day."

"Ah, dear Ulic, hope sounds in your voice; come to me soon again."

Ulic left the gloomy house, passed through the bleak court-yard, and getting into a cab, drove to Colonel Tarbert's rooms in Piccadilly. His mission was not pleasant, and he considered he had better, by accomplishing it at once, rid himself of a burden. His knowledge of the colonel's character, together with the evidence of the diary, convinced him Lord Kerry's conclusion was right; yet having a strong sense of justice,



Ulic was anxious to hear the colonel's explanation before finally condemning him.

On reaching his destination, he walked gravely upstairs and rapped at a door bearing his cousin's name.

"Come in," cried a voice, certainly not the colonel's.

The visitor did as desired, and then paused in wonder and dismay. The whole apartment was in a state of confusion; the furniture being hustled into a corner that greater space might be afforded for the boxes, portmanteaux, clothes, books, and papers strewn the carpet. In the midst of this chaos, a pewter pint measure by his side, a pair of trousers in his extended arms, knelt a man whom Ulic recognized as his cousin's servant.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, struggling to his feet.

"Is your master at home, Lane?"

"No, sir," the man replied.

"When do you expect him back?"

"Well, sir, he's gone out of town."

"For long?" asked Ulic, as he more carefully surveyed the room.

"That's more nor I can say, Mr. Ulic. He went quite sudden to-day, leaving me behind, and a deal of packing I had."

"Can you give me his address?"

"I don't know it, sir," the man replied with a quiet smile.

Ulic was about to leave when the sound of a heavy step on the stair was heard, and a second later a man with a square face and massive jaw entered the room. Ulic at once recognized the Rev. Amos Berkeley. He looked round the apartment wonderingly and gave a low whistle.

"Moving, eh?" he said to the servant, with whom he seemed on familiar terms.

"Moved," replied Lane briefly.



"Gone?" he asked in tones betraying disappointment and displeasure.

"Out of town."

"Do you know when he will be back?"

"In a few weeks."

"Not leaving these quarters?"

"No."

"Well, I'll call another day." He looked at Ulic full in the face, nodded to the servant, and departed.

When he was beyond earshot, Ulic remarked casually:

"I fancy I know that man, but I can't remember his name."

"He's Jacob Glender, a sporting man, sir."

"Ah, of course. Gives Colonel Tarbert advice, doesn't he?"

"That's it, Mr. Ulic; a clever fellow."

"Come here often?" Ulic inquired carelessly.

"Well, sir, pretty often."

"Good-day," said Ulic.

He descended the stairs soberly and sadly, for he had no longer a doubt on his mind concerning the colonel's committal of the forgery.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### PHILIP'S SEARCH.

AMERTON was now weighted by trouble as a burden from which there was no relief. Helpless in his grief, he was as a reed shaken by the wind. His affection for Miriam, which he believed had died out of his life, now she was no longer his, fully awoke, and the greatness of his sorrow was but the measure of his love.



Returning alone to his home on the night of her flight, his senses mocked him with illusions of her presence. As he sat in the study striving to form plans for his search, he started repeatedly, now believing her footfall echoed in the passage outside, anon convinced her voice sounded in an adjoining room. At such times he was thrilled by hope, surmising she had repented her design and returned to him; his heart beat rapidly, his hearing was strained to catch some vibration confirming first impressions; but silence fell upon him with sickening weight and chilled his expectations to numbness.

And as time passed the sorrow which mocks itself with thoughts of joys long dead visited him. He remembered the happiness that had been his in the first weeks of his married life, and mourned that its duration had been brief.

It was almost midnight when the street door bell rang sharply through the house. This time there was surely no delusion. The servants had retired; he rose quickly and opened the door, and with a sense of disappointment, followed by a feeling of satisfaction, beheld Inspector Collins.

"You have some news for me?" he asked.

The Inspector nodded his head, and Amerton led the way into the study. The detective sat down, placed his cap on the floor near his feet, and unbuttoning his coat produced a pocket-book. Philip watched him turn over its pages filled with closely written notes, wondering how many secrets they held, what clues they gave to acts of crime and wrong.

"I can't exactly say, sir," he began, "that I have traced the parties in whom you are interested; but a gent answering the description you gave, and a lady, whose face was covered by a thick veil, left Charing Cross station by the evening train for Paris."



"Could it have been them?" he asked.

"I'll read you the notes made by one of our men. You see some members of the force are always on duty at the principal stations. Trained to observe, they notice not only people wanted, but also such as attract their attention or rouse their suspicion. Notes are then made which sometimes prove of service. Now, sir, one of our men named Green, being at Charing Cross station when the evening train left, noticed a lady closely veiled; she seemed nervous and impatient. When speaking to the gent who accompanied her, her voice was low as if she didn't wish to be heard, and she continually looked round as if expecting or dreading notice. When the gent had got their tickets she entered a first-class carriage, and sat in a corner where she was freest from observation. This naturally attracted Green's notice and he made the following notes. 'Lady—medium height, plump, erect figure, wearing long black cloak. Gent—broad-shouldered and stout, prominent grey eyes, heavy moustache, no whiskers or beard, military air, dressed in grey tweed suit and round hard hat.'"

Amerton groaned aloud.

"Rather like the gent you described, sir."

"I have no doubt it's the same."

Satisfied with this admission, Inspector Collins shut his book with a gratified snap, and replaced it in his breast pocket. "May I ask, sir," he said, "if I can be of any further service to you?"

"I think not at present, unless you will give me the address of a Parisian detective on whose shrewdness I can rely."

"Then you intend——"

"To follow them to Paris, yes."

"In that case you cannot do better than consult Monsieur Tange," said the inspector, producing a small



leather case and handing Amerton a card. "He is a man of genius, with the eye of a hawk and the instinct of a bloodhound. If you want to trace the parties, ask his advice and take it, sir."

Amerton wrote a cheque for the Inspector's service, and accompanying him to the door bade him good-night.

Left alone once more he no longer sat down to bewail his fate; resolved on performing a duty, his strength of character rose to aid its accomplishment. For the next few hours he was busy in packing his portmanteau, and writing brief notes to editors and publishers, announcing his intended absence, the extent of which he could not determine. Then overcome by mental and physical fatigue he lay down, and strove to rest. But sleep fled before the haunting thoughts and distracting memories rising before him in the darkness of night. Each slow-pacing hour teemed with pictures, in which his wife was the principal figure, and when daylight came he hailed it with unspeakable relief.

Morning saw him on his way to Paris. He was now consumed by impatience to behold his wife and bring her back to the home she had abandoned. He felt no uncertainty regarding the decision she would make, being convinced she would return with him. With every mile of the journey his spirits rose, believing he should soon stand face to face with his wife, and rescue her from the tempter.

The fatigue and excitement he had undergone during the last twenty-four hours overcame him, and he slept in the train whirling him through France. His slumbers however were not peaceful, for as in his waking hours so was it in his sleep; his wife's face was before him, now smiling on him as in the early days of their married life, now gazing at him in mute reproach,



finally fleeing from him terrified and saddened. Then it seemed they two stood alone in a vast world of profound silence; no motion of life was perceptible, no sound of moving things in heaven or on earth came to his ears. The air was heavy from nameless oppression: he would have cried aloud, but articulation became impossible; she who was with him could speak no word or make no sign. Even as he gazed, her face and form grew indistinct; fear fell upon him that she was dead: in an agony of apprehension he stretched forward his arms towards her; they embraced space, and he woke with a moan to find himself entering Paris.

Before he had been many hours in the capital, he had obtained an interview with Monsieur Tange, from whom he learned that two persons answering to the description of Miriam and Colonel Tarbert had that evening left for Turin. Philip determined to continue his pursuit the following morning.

Meanwhile his impatience allowed him no rest. Doubt arose in his mind as to whether the detective had mistaken the identity of his wife and her lover; and thinking and hoping they might yet be in Paris, he mixed among crowds on the boulevards, scanning every face he met, and visited the principal theatres in hope of finding the objects of his search. It was morning when he returned to his hotel weary and dejected; next day he departed for Turin.

Here he encountered vexations that would have daunted a resolution less strong than his. The Italian police were wholly devoid of the penetration or sagacity of the French detective force, and could afford him no help. One officer indeed declared he had seen two such persons as Amerton described, but on cross-examination their height and general appearance proved to be wholly unlike them. The officials had no sympathy



with his search. The fact of a lady preferring another man to her husband was of such common occurrence in their experience as to be scarce worthy of notice. In speaking to him on the subject they could hardly repress their smiles, and Amerton secretly felt he was an object of wonder and amusement to these merry men.

One of them, a grey-haired grandfather who had seen the world, ventured to impart portion of his philosophy to the grave-faced Englishman. The signor, he considered, should take consolation in considering the lady had evinced bad taste in leaving a husband so brave and gentle. But women were strange creatures, and seldom appreciated their lawful spouses; it was their way. He would assume the liberty of reminding the signor the world was large, and kindly heaven had peopled it with beautiful women. It was not for him to boast, but assuredly it was universally acknowledged the daughters of Italy were fair and loving; there were many of them, he had no doubt, would willingly comfort and console the signor in his great sorrow.

Philip turned from him in disgust, and left the philosopher to mourn over the uncourteous savages of England.

It was clear to Amerton he must not expect much help from the Italian police. Resting on the assurance of Monsieur Tange that the object of his search had started for Turin, it occurred to him she might yet be here, and accordingly he lingered in this picturesque town, frequenting churches, palaces and galleries in hourly expectation of finding her. But his search was futile, and no day passed but he was tortured by thinking that the man whom of all others he most detested was with her. It seemed cruel to think he was powerless to rescue her, to assure her no anger rested in his heart against her, only compassion and forgiveness.



A thousand times he called upon Benoni, but in this hour of need the mystic seemed to desert him. Had Benoni but humoured him in his folly to deride him in his misery; or was this sorrow a trial through which he must necessarily pass? He remembered Amuni had said that in his onward course temptation would assail, grief attend, and humiliation lie down with him; for 'twas only when he had sown in pain and sorrow he might reap in peace and joy. He scarce knew if he should blame Benoni for this desertion, for in his present bewildering condition his thoughts became wholly confused.

And he to whose eyes the world had never seemed fair, now beheld desolation descend upon all things; for hope was wrenched from his heart as a tree is uprooted from the ground, and all the world was sad.

But though discouraged and disheartened by the failure of his search, he still resolved to find his wife and bring her back to his home. This was a reparation he felt assured he owed her, and from his purpose no man might gainsay him. Losing all clue of her at Turin, he resolved on allowing his pursuit to be guided by chance; for in the tumult of his present feelings the voice of intuition seemed lost. He therefore travelled to Genoa, where he again made inquiries of the police, with a result not less unsatisfactory than at Turin. After spending some days here he left for Pisa and from thence proceeded to Florence.

Revisiting cities where not two years since he had spent the first weeks of his married life, was inexpressibly painful to him. Scarce a street in these well-remembered towns but brought back recollections which smote him sorely. Here was the hotel at which they had stayed, there the cathedral they had entered together, beyond, the palaces before which they had stood in wonder and admiration. Every stone had a



memory which called out to him, and day by day a sickening feeling fell upon his heart because of all that had been and was not.

Up and down thoroughfares filled with life, colour, music and motion; in and out of cathedrals crowded with worshippers and supplicants, he passed, a pale-faced wanderer sad amongst his contented kind. With the interests and pleasures of those around him he had no concern, he was dead to all things save his untiring search. Each morning he rose with resolution undaunted; every night saw his pursuit unsuccessful. His perseverance, however, was not to be shaken and seemed at last about to be rewarded.

One day a member of the police informed Philip a lady and gentleman, answering in all respects the description given by him, had passed that morning through Florence in a train starting from Arezzo and journeying to Rome. The gentleman had alighted at the station, but returned immediately to his carriage. Hearing this news Philip left by the next train for the capital; but here all trace of those he sought vanished. Rome was indeed crowded by English and American visitors, but according to the police, none of them seemed to correspond with the details Amerton gave. Having now considerable experience of the carelessness of the Italian police, this fact did not dishearten him; he therefore determined to continue his personal search.

Days of pain and weariness now succeeded each other. Galleries, gardens, streets, ruins, palaces, churches were visited by him continually. More than once it indeed seemed as if he had found his wife; a slight resemblance in a profile, a similarity in height, made his heart beat quick from expectation; but he became plunged in greater despondency on discovering his disappointment.



Three months had now elapsed since he had left England. Ulic Tarbert wrote to him continually, but gave him no tidings of her concerning whom he most wished to hear. With Lady Pompey who was in Spain he held no communication. When he had spent several weeks in Rome, he resolved to leave the city, yet knew not in what direction he should pursue his quest. No thought of returning home whilst his mission was unsuccessful occurred to him; so long as his wife remained under the protection of another man he could not resume his former life.

How many months more he might continue a wanderer he dared not think. His health, never strong, had under strain of excitement and stress of fatigue more than once threatened to give way. The one object occupying his thoughts night and day drove him almost to distraction. His life he acknowledged was ruined; his popularity as a novelist had received a serious blow by the abrupt discontinuation of his serial story in an important magazine; and his future productions, and consequently his income, must of necessity suffer because of his enforced idleness from literary work. Yet so long as life was left him would he search, throughout the world if necessary until he found his wife. From this fixed thought he never departed.

On an evening when he felt more tired and depressed than usual, he passed the church of Trinita de' Monti, and hearing sounds of music floating towards him, entered within its doors. The interior was unlighted, save for tapers burning on the high altar, and dim yellow lamps glimmering before shrines. The Gothic arched transept and side chapels were wrapped in shadows; he could but indistinctly perceive the dames du Sacré Cœur and their pupils kneeling with bowed heads within the choir.



Taking a little rush-bottomed chair, he seated himself near a pillar, and listened to the pure sweet voices of these young girls, rising and falling in plaintive supplication to the accompaniment of a mellow-toned organ. His receptive nature yielded to the influences around him. The hour, with its fading light and gathering shade; the church with its vision of white veiled, sweet-voiced worshippers; its radiant altar gleaming through clouds of incense; its chapels with wondrous pictures and marble statues whose white outlines seemed ever and anon to vibrate with sudden life in the gathering gloom, impressed him strongly. The world with its vortex of pleasures, its whirlwind of passions, its burden of sorrows, had no place in this home of prayer. The spirit of peace dwelling in its atmosphere slowly crept into his heart; a weight was gradually lifted from his soul; healing balm fell upon wounds that had bled overmuch because of their depth; and a sense of grateful rest filled him with comfort he had not known for long. Overcome by his emotions he buried his face in his hands and prayed.

The plaintive music which had lulled him almost to unconsciousness suddenly ceased, but he dared not move; the odour of incense became stronger and more strong; and save for the faint tinkling of a little bell, the air was tremulous with silence; a benediction fell upon him. When presently he raised his head the church was almost deserted. The sisters and their pupils had quietly vanished; the altar lights were extinguished; the priest and his acolytes had disappeared.

Leaving the church with lingering steps he crossed the roadway, and leaned on the broad old balustrade overlooking the flight of wide time-worn steps descending to the Piazza di Spagna. As he did the bell of a neighbouring church suddenly rang out the



Ave Maria, and was answered faintly in the far distance. Then from every belfry throughout the length and breadth of the city came the chiming of bells, clashing in a medley of sweet sounds, ceasing suddenly as if for breath to begin anew, all impatient meanwhile for faint responses that rose from distant convents without the city gates, and quiet monasteries surrounded by the dreary Campagna.

When this farewell to day was hushed to silence, darkness swiftly fell upon this capital of many memories; for already the sun had gone down as a cloud of fire behind the black dome of St. Peter's; and the countless towers, turrets, and belfries of churches, the terraced roofs of houses, and columned fronts of palaces, lying in a tangled mass between the distant Vatican and the hill of Monta Trinita were quickly lapsing into general indistinctness. In the Piazza di Spagna below Philip saw shops gleam brightly, and watched the light of street lamps spring into existence down the narrow Via de' Condotti, opposite where he stood. Beyond these specks of flame all was darkness.

The swift death of this fair day, begun so brightly, bore some affinity to the sudden cloud that had fallen on his life. He watched the deeper blue of night cross the sky, and saw the first stars spangle in their spheres. No sound disturbed him; time passed unheeded.

Scenes in the history of Imperial Rome, blood-stained and triumphant, cruel and regal, rose before him. Where were now the actors who had taken part in these civil wars and brilliant pageants; of what account to them the power and glory for which they had sacrificed much? These things they sought abided not; neither had they; all that was mortal of them had passed into nothingness and night, and only ruins and fragments remained to tell that they had been.

An icy breath sweeping past his cheek suddenly



recalled his thoughts, and without beholding it, he became conscious of a figure standing beside him, even as the blind feel the warmth of sunlight without perceiving its rays. A slight shudder ran through his frame; but for a second he was incapable of movement. Then, with an effort, he turned round expecting to see Benoni, and beheld his wife standing near. Her downcast face was pallid; her blue eyes gazed into his beseechingly; her pale lips parted as if to speak.

"Miriam, Miriam," he exclaimed, stretching out his arms, forgetful of the past in his satisfaction of the present. But without a word she glided noiselessly aside, and vanished from his sight.

"Miriam, Miriam," he cried aloud, unable fully to comprehend what he had seen, but no response came from the darkness. "O, God," he cried out, "leave me at least my senses." He did not doubt he had veritably beheld his wife, yet could not understand for what purpose this vision had appeared. Then a thought flashed upon him, which made him pause. Surely she was no longer of this earth. He remembered the deathly pallor of her face, the ethereal light in her eyes. Had her spirit travelled from the bounds of another world to entreat pardon for the wrong she had wrought? His mind grew confused from fears memories and surmises rushing upon him.

Leaving the spot where he had stood, he descended the steps, and reaching his hotel immediately went to his bedroom. The candles on his dressing-table were lighted, and near the mirror he perceived a little note directed in Benoni's writing. Hastily tearing it open he read the following words: "Peace be on you. Return homewards; we shall meet in London.—  
BENONI."



## CHAPTER XVII.

## COLONEL TARBERT IS PERPLEXED.

ONE bleak afternoon in March Ulic Tarbert walked down Piccadilly. His mind was occupied in thinking of Amerton, from whom he had heard that morning. Philip had written in a dejected mood, stating his failure in discovering any reliable traces of his wife, and his despair of being able to rescue her from the life on which she had entered. The letter being penned before Amerton had seen his wife in spirit, or read Benoni's note, contained no mention of these facts.

Ulic had heard nothing of Colonel Tarbert since his elopement, and was unable to obtain any information concerning his movements, or otherwise help Amerton. The news of his brother's delinquency had grieved Lord Kerry, and confirmed his belief in the colonel having forged his father's name. He would have submitted the writing to an expert, but Ulic begged him to await Bob's return, and hear what explanations he might offer; and for the present the matter rested.

As Ulic passed the house in which the colonel occupied rooms, he raised his eyes to the windows and was surprised to see light shining from them. He concluded his cousin had returned, and all the indignation he had formerly felt against him taking new life, he resolved immediately to demand of him where was the woman he had ruined. But reflecting that if face to face with him at that moment he would not be accountable for his acts, and knowing the colonel was a man not to be forced into giving information, he saw it was better policy to control his feelings before meeting him.

He therefore determined to walk up and down the



opposite side of Piccadilly until his sudden anger somewhat cooled. He was resolved in not postponing his visit, indeed he could not rest until he received some tidings of the faithless wife which might be communicated to her husband. As he passed backwards and forwards his glance was continually fixed on the windows of the colonel's rooms, and once he saw the reflection of his cousin's portly form on the blinds. There was therefore no doubt of his return, and impatient of further delay, and determined to conceal his feelings at least until his object had been gained, Ulic directly crossed to the house and knocked at the door. It was opened by Lane, the colonel's servant, who seemed surprised to see him.

"Your master has come back," Ulic said.

"Yes, sir," replied Lane, standing in the centre of the passage as if wishing to intercept his entrance.

"I know," said Ulic, moving the man aside as if he were a piece of furniture, "he is at home, and I shall announce myself," and so saying he went upstairs and rapped at the sitting-room door.

"Come in," cried the colonel.

Ulic entered, and found his cousin standing in the middle of the floor, surrounded by portmanteaux which had just been unpacked. His face looked bronzed as if from travel, his figure more portly, the expression of his protruding eyes more unpleasant than before. At first sight of Ulic he was surprised, and evidently displeased; however, he immediately recovered himself, and said carelessly as he advanced with extended hand:

"Ah, Ulic, it is you? How did you know I had returned?"

Ulic put his hands behind his back and replied, "I saw light in your windows, and took it for granted you had come back. Lane would probably have denied you were at home, but I said I should announce my-



self." His tone was studiously cold, if civil. Noting this, and heedful likewise he had ignored his outstretched hand, a hard light came into the colonel's eyes, his manner suddenly changed, and a contemptuous smile hovered on his lips. He turned away, and placing his back against the chimney-piece, surveyed his visitor with a critical gaze, in which there was not a little insolence.

"May I inquire," he said slowly, "to what cause I am indebted for the pleasure of this unexpected visit."

"Because I wished to ask you——" Ulic began, and then fearing his eagerness might defeat the object of his desire, hesitated.

"Concerning my health," the colonel added sneeringly. "Well, it must be a matter of interest to you. Believe me, it has always been a source of regret to me, when I consider my life stands between you and forty thousand a year. Poor Kerry, being too good for earth, cannot live long. Heaven in its wisdom will doubtless soon take him to itself; by the way, on what stage of the journey is he now? I am anxious to know. The children of Israel whom I have favoured with bonds count his feeble days."

Ulic could not sufficiently control himself to reply, and his cousin continued:

"When he has gone the way of all flesh, his honours will be thrust upon me, and then you will be my heir presumptive. Therefore, dear Ulic, I don't love you; Kerry doesn't love me. I would not grudge him to Heaven, and you would laugh to know I was in hell. Consider how potent a motive for love or hate is money."

"I didn't come here that I might listen to your opinions on such subjects."

"Really. You merely came to see me. Very kind of you. You and I, Ulic, have never been friends;



why, because no man loves his heir. Now, in order to remove this barrier, I intend one of these days, when I have sown my wild oats, to marry some fair creature anxious to reclaim my wickedness in return for a coronet, and beget babes. Then you will be no longer my heir."

"That shall be as it please Heaven."

The colonel laughed, but an angry light in his eyes showed his mirth was baleful.

"A truly religious sentiment," he answered. "My proposal, I see, doesn't fall in with your schemes, and you believe, as all men, a just Heaven will help you to your desires. Has some kindly and speculative Hebrew aided you on the chance of your succeeding to the peerage? Times are, I know, hard; but don't entertain false hopes: you will never be Lord Kerry."

"I came here," said Ulic, subduing his temper and steadying his voice, "to ask you a question. Where is Mrs. Amerton?"

Colonel Tarbert winced; his heavy lids almost closed over his grey eyes. For a moment he made no answer, surveying his cousin the while deliberately and critically.

"You are interested in the lady?" he flippantly asked, raising his brows.

"I am."

"Ah, how charming. The wives of our friends are proverbially fascinating. Strange, isn't it, what attraction another man's property has for us. That you admire her is a revelation, though not a surprise. It is quite a family affair. I had no idea we had a single taste in common; but then I grant you she is an exceedingly fine woman, or was, I should have said."

He paused to observe the effect of his words; but Ulic strove hardly to conceal a wrath which well-nigh choked him from suppression.



"You say was," he replied gravely, "do you mean she is dead?"

"I'm not aware that she is. Don't look so solemn, my friend; there is yet a prospect of happiness for you. If I have forestalled you in her affections, you must remember I am your senior by some years."

Ulic longed to clutch him by the throat, but he had not yet gained the information desired, and therefore continued to assume an outward calmness.

"I merely spoke of her in the past tense," continued the colonel, "because she no longer has any attraction for me; hence I conclude her charms have vanished. No doubt a man who has not had my experiences may think otherwise—yourself for instance. I am easily satiated and desirous of constant change. Once, indeed, I offered to make her my wife; probably being aware of my peculiarities, she was judicious enough to refuse me. Then she married another, an excellent fellow, I have heard, and extremely talented, it is admitted. Later on, as you are aware, she did me the honour of accompanying me abroad for a short trip."

"Your evil arts tempted her."

"Very flattering, my dear Ulic, to say so. I have fascinations no doubt; but then a woman never needs a tempter."

"This man," said Ulic in his heart, "is an incarnate fiend;" but with an effort he still controlled himself.

"When we had grown tired of each other's company we parted. I may warn you that, though she is a superb creature, she has a devil of a temper."

"Where did you leave her?"

"At Milan. But I doubt if you will find her there now."

"Do you know where she really is at present?"



"Not in the least."

Ulic felt doubtful concerning the truth of these words, fearing greatly they were spoken for the purpose of misleading him.

"I wish I could help you in this matter," continued his cousin, with a leer, "but I fear my recommendation would be of little service."

"You are a scoundrel," said Ulic.

The colonel raised his eyebrows.

"Ah," he replied with studied coolness, "one is never appreciated by the members of one's family: from you least of all would I expect justice, you who are blinded to my merits by jealousy."

"Not all your effrontery will blind me to the fact that you are a villain."

With a few rapid strides the colonel with clenched fists and eyes ablaze, advanced and faced his cousin. Ulic never flinched, every muscle in his body hardened in preparation for combat, and he keenly watched for the first movement the colonel might make. For a couple of seconds they stood staring at each other fixedly, anger, hate and defiance glaring in their eyes, then with a flip of his finger and thumb the elder man said as he turned away:

"Bah, you are but a mere hot-headed boy."

"And you are a villain and a coward."

The colonel strode forward again and with his clenched fist aimed a blow at his cousin's face. Ulic, who had some experience in the art of self-defence, parried the stroke, and in return struck his assailant in the throat. The blow staggered the colonel, who with a curse hit out from the shoulder. Ulic received his blow in the chest, and next instant they had gripped each other and were struggling with might and main. The younger man's lighthness overmatched the elder's strength; both fell to the



ground, Ulic uppermost. By a dexterous movement he freed himself from the colonel's grasp, and planting one knee on his chest, raised his hand as if to strike him.

"You beast," he said contemptuously, and rising to his feet he turned away.

With the dignity which self-command insures he walked to the other end of the room, and then turned round. The colonel was by this time seated in a chair, panting for breath, his face flushed and angry, his protruding eyes glittering with hate.

Ulic watched him with ill-concealed contempt.

"There is something more I have to say," he remarked.

"Leave my room," replied the colonel, rising as if to enforce his command.

"Not until I have given you my message."

"I shall receive no message delivered by you."

"But you shall hear this," said Ulic as he advanced within a few feet of him.

"If you don't leave the room——" he began.

"Some months ago," said Ulic interrupting him, "you cashed a cheque for five thousand pounds, supposed to bear your father's signature. This your brother believes a forgery, and awaits your explanation as to how and when the cheque was received."

The colonel sat down again: his face blanched, his mouth twitched nervously, the heavy lids closed over his eyes. All consideration of his recent humiliation faded in the light of this new trouble rising unexpectedly before him. His usual self-command did not, however, wholly forsake him, and he answered:

"You may tell Kerry his doubts arise from his suspicious mind; he has always treated me badly, and this last indignity doesn't surprise me." His cynicism had quite deserted him.



"You have not answered my question," said Ulic sternly, "as to when the cheque was received."

"It was sent me by my father," he replied. "I have no further explanation to give," and he rose once more from his chair and sullenly turned away as if desirous of ending the conversation.

"It bears the date of a day on which your father never left his bed."

"Does that prove he didn't send it? I'll bandy no more words with you or any one else on the subject. Go."

"You have no more to say regarding the discrepancy between your father's signature and that on the cheque in question?"

"I defy any man to prove it's a forgery," he replied wrathfully.

"Any man," replied Ulic, watchful of the effects his words might produce; "any man; even the Rev. Amos Berkeley?"

The colonel stood still, striving to control limb and muscle; yet, though aware Ulic's eyes were fixed upon him, he felt powerless to command the expression of his face. Surely it was a trying moment. This sudden mention of his accomplice's name came upon him as a shock, that for a moment deprived him of all power to think, of all effort to reply. But by degrees the old habit of self-command slowly returned, and he answered:

"I am ignorant of what you insinuate. I have never heard the name you mentioned."

Ulic glanced at him keenly.

"I have," he said, and without another word left the room.

The colonel went swiftly to the door, and locking it returned and flung himself into an armchair. Perspiration oozed from his forehead, he clenched his



hands until the finger-nails were buried in his palms, he cursed his brother heartily, and earnestly prayed for his speedy death.

He had congratulated himself on the success of his venture, believing all chance of detection had ended with his father's demise, and now was his brother stirring up doubts, demanding explanations, and ready to brand him as a thief. But dead men tell no tales: his father could never denounce the signature on the cheque as a forgery, and there were none to prove it such unless Jacob Glender.

Could this returned convict have betrayed him? It was not likely he would voluntarily place himself within the clutches of the law; but otherwise how had Ulic come to know his name, and why had he mentioned it to him? Had some pressure been laid upon Glender to make the confession, or had he, for some purpose of his own, divulged the secret?

Colonel Tarbert now remembered that amongst a pile of correspondence, which had accumulated in his absence and remained yet unopened, he had recognized Glender's handwriting on two envelopes. Crossing to the chimney-piece, where a couple of rows of letters, bills and circulars were ranged, he picked out those bearing Jacob's characters. By way of preparing himself for the worst, before opening them, he went to a sideboard, poured out some brandy, and drank it at a draught. Then, looking at the postmark dates of the envelopes, he opened them in order of priority. The first, written two months back, ran as follows:

"I have called and found you were gone out of town. I see by a society paper, which my wife takes that she may read scandal about her betters, a lady has accompanied you on your journey. Your departure is rather unfortunate for me, as I want to see you on business. Let me know when you come back."



There was nothing threatening or unfriendly in this note, and the colonel laid it aside with a sense of relief. He then tore open the second envelope, and read its contents.

"I suppose you have not yet returned. I have been expecting a line from you to say when I might call. Please let it be as soon as possible."

This second communication dated but a few weeks back. They contained neither threat of exposure nor confession of betrayal as he had feared. He wondered what the fellow had to say, or what was the business of which he desired to talk. Though the notes did not convey the news he dreaded, yet they filled him with vague uneasiness, of which he resolved to rid himself as soon as possible by seeking Jacob Glender and hearing what he had to communicate. Before leaving he called Lane, to whom he said:

"I'm going out," and added, with studied carelessness, "By the way, did Glender call whilst I was away?"

"Yes, sir; he was here the afternoon of the day on which you left town."

"Did he give you any message for me?"

"No, sir; he said as how he'd write."

"Did any one call whilst he was here?"

"No, sir; but he came when Mr. Ulic was inquiring of you."

"Then they met here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had they any conversation?"

Before answering Lane placed the index finger of his right hand on his chin to indicate consideration.

"They never exchanged a word, sir."

"Did they leave together?"

"No, sir. Mr. Ulic remained behind."

"Did he make any remark? Tell me all that



happened, and don't leave me to ask you so many questions."

"Well, sir, when Glender went, Mr. Ulic turns to me and he says, 'I knows his face, but I can't remember his name.'"

"And *you* told him," said the colonel impatiently.

"'It's Jacob Glender, sir,' says I, 'a sporting man——'"

"Well——"

"Well, sir, that's all so far as I can remember."

"He mentioned no other name?"

"No, sir. He bade me good afternoon, and left at once."

"Did he overtake Glender?"

"It's more than I can say, sir."

"You should have seen."

"Beg pardon, sir; but I didn't know it made any difference."

Tarbert recollected himself, and added, "Well, it doesn't matter. I would rather Mr. Ulic didn't know him. Glender is a man whose advice can't always be depended on, that's all."

And, putting on his hat, he went downstairs and out of the house.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### JACOB GLENDER MAKES A PROPOSAL.

COLONEL TARBERT walked down Piccadilly that he might have more leisure to collect his thoughts and arrange his plans. He could not set aside the fear that his forgery had been discovered, and shrank from the idea of appearing before his brother as a culprit. Much rather would he that his father had been his



judge or condemner, but to give Kerry this triumph over him wounded him deeply. How Ulic had come to learn Glender's real name perplexed him sorely, and as he strode forward he swore he would be even with his cousin one day.

His motions keeping pace with his hurried thoughts, he soon found himself in the narrow dark street branching from the Strand. Arriving at the house in which Jacob Glender lived, the colonel found the street door closed. A row of little brass bell knobs confronted him, one of which he rang without waiting to consider if it communicated with Glender's apartments. In response, hurried footsteps were heard rushing down stairs, and the door was partially opened by a dirty-faced boy, who thrust his head and shoulders forward in the aperture, leaving his body and legs safely deposited in the hall.

"What is it?" he asked, when he had finished chewing a mouthful of bread, for the youth had been interrupted in the pleasant course of his supper.

"Is Mr. Glender at home?" asked the colonel.

"Don't know," replied the lad. "Why didn't you ring his bell? Top knob for the third floor."

"I have made a mistake."

"An' brought me down as has been on my legs all day."

"Better you should be on your legs than on your head."

"Is it?" asked the boy sharply.

"Here," said the colonel, handing him a shilling.

"Golly, you are a brick," he exclaimed as beaming with delight he threw open the door. "Shall I see if Mr. Glender is at home?"

"Thank you, I'll go up myself."

"Well, I'll give you a light," said he, striking a match on the leg of his trousers and holding it aloft as



if it were a torch. "Gas on the lobbies is an extra after eight. Mind them broken steps—the landlord is a mean chap, but there's plenty of them in the world. Golly, wait till I light another match; there's the stairs leading to Mr. Glender's floor. I'll light you down if he's not in."

"Thank you," answered the colonel, "I have some matches."

He had by this time arrived at the door of Glender's room, which he struck with his stick. No answer greeted him, and he rapped again with like result. Concluding his call had been made in vain, he was about to leave, when he suddenly turned the handle of the door. It yielded to his pressure and he entered the apartment. At first he thought it unoccupied. A low fire smouldered in the grate, a jet of gas between the windows flared brilliantly, the remains of a supper laid for two rested on the centre table.

Not until he had noted these details did the colonel, looking towards a corner of the room, discover Glender lying in an arm-chair, his feet resting on another, his face covered by a cotton handkerchief. On a table conveniently close to his right hand stood a bottle, an empty tumbler and a jug of water; he had evidently soothed himself to sleep by means the faculty would have described as artificial. His breath was deep and regular, and coming near him the colonel became conscious of a strong odour of brandy.

Fearing he would not be in a condition proper to discourse on business if suddenly awakened, the colonel was about to leave, but the anxiety he suffered to learn if the fellow had betrayed him, or to hear how Ulic had come to discover his name, overcame him, and he resolved on arousing Glender.

Standing beside him he therefore lightly struck his leg with a cane. The sleeper moved his position,



breathed less heavily for a moment or two, and then fell into rest deeper than before. Colonel Tarbert then put the point of his stick under the handkerchief covering Glender's head, and by a quick movement flung it in mid-air. The sight it revealed was not pleasant. His closed eyes were sunk under his low forehead, his eyebrows contracted in a frown, his thick lips pressed together, whilst the rigidity of his massive chin was more conspicuous than in his waking hours.

The colonel, with fear, doubt, and anger in his mind, looked at the sleeper for some minutes in silence as if he would penetrate into the mysteries of this man's mind and ascertain if he had really betrayed him. And this latter suspicion growing almost to conviction as he regarded Glender's evil face, a strong temptation came upon him to strangle the fellow as he slept. Even as this thought took possession of his mind, Glender clenched his big-jointed hands, his broad chest heaved, his head moved spasmodically from side to side, his features expressed struggle.

"What a brute the fellow looks," said the colonel, a sense of repugnance, not unmingled with vague terror, taking possession of him. For a moment he thought of leaving the place and never voluntarily seeing him again. The impulse was so strong he walked towards the door resolved to obey its dictates; yet he had not gone many steps when he laughed at what he considered the weakness of a moment, and returning to Glender struck him forcibly on the legs.

The sleeping man awoke with a hoarse cry as if giving utterance to long-suppressed agony, flung his hands in the air, and glaring at the colonel with a look of horror in his startled eyes, said in a low, hoarse voice, "I have been dreaming of you, and—and here you are before me."

"I'm sorry to disturb you in such a pleasant



occupation," remarked the visitor in his usual ironical tone.

"It was not pleasant," replied Glender, "but it was deuced real, and it has upset me I can tell you. I must drink some brandy to set me right again. Have some?"

"No thanks, and I think you had better follow my example."

"I know what's best for myself," he said sulkily, as he seized the bottle and pouring out some of its contents drank them unadulterated. "Gad," he exclaimed, setting the tumbler down, "it was a horrible dream, and when I woke and saw you I thought it was your ghost." With a ghastly attempt at hilarity he strove to laugh, but the sound jarred roughly on its hearer.

"That's one of the results of drinking too much brandy before going to sleep," remarked the colonel.

"May be," replied the other, "but such a dream never came to me before, and I hope never will again."

The colonel walked backwards and forwards impatiently, thinking his visit had been made at an inopportune hour, and deliberating whether he had not better depart and leave Glender to recover himself. The latter remained absorbed in thought a moment, the effects of the scene which recently visited his mind had not yet vanished. Suddenly rising and approaching the colonel he said earnestly, "Shake hands and let us be good friends."

"By all means," the latter replied, extending his hand.

"Swear," continued Glender, still more seriously, "swear that we shall remain friends for ever."

"It is best we should always pull in the same boat."

"That's not enough," Glender persisted. "Swear, at least, you will never quarrel with me."



"I fear you haven't slept away the effects of your brandy drinking."

"Won't you do what I ask?" said Glender impatiently.

"How can I? None of us can see into the future."

"I know that, and I want to be stronger than fate. I'm not a superstitious man, but I have a reason for asking you to swear you will not quarrel with me; then if ever you are tempted to fight with me you will remember your oath. Swear," he said beseechingly.

"Very well," replied the colonel, believing Glender was yet half drunk, and desirous of pacifying him, "I swear."

Glender stretched his hand, and the colonel felt it tremble in his grasp. "The fellow," he thought, "has been drinking for some days."

"Now you have spoken the word," said Glender, "don't forget it if you ever feel inclined to quarrel with me. I shall think of it, I promise you."

"What is the meaning of all this nonsense," asked the colonel, feeling scared to a degree he would neither admit nor betray.

"Never mind."

"I believe you are still drunk."

"Perhaps I am," responded Jacob stolidly.

"Then I'd better leave you to recover your senses."

"Don't go," said Glender, "I'm all right. Just you wait a moment, whilst I go into the next room and dip my head in water, then I'll be as cool as a cucumber, and as fit for business as the Lord Chancellor himself. Leave me at once if I'm not."

He disappeared before any reply could be made, and the colonel for some seconds listened to the splashing of water, followed by heavy breathings and hissings announcing the drying operation was in process. When



these ceased Glender returned, his face glowing, his short light hair standing like bristles on his head.

"Now," he began, "I'm at your service. Won't you sit down?"

"I found two notes of yours awaiting me," said the colonel, seating himself.

"I know. When did you return?"

"This morning."

"Pleasant time abroad?"

"Yes," answered the colonel curtly.

"Lady come back with you?"

"Am I to understand," said the colonel rising, "you desire to see me simply that you may ask impertinent questions regarding my private affairs?"

"Why, what a rum fellow you are. If you can't take a pleasant word as it's meant, I'll fall in with your humour and give you a serious one," replied Glender.

"It will suit me better."

"I am glad to hear you say so."

The colonel became aware he had made a mistake in irritating his companion. If Glender had been under the influence of drink on awaking from his sleep, all signs of intoxication had now vanished. His face was serious in expression, his voice steady in tone, his manner composed in bearing.

"Now," said he determinedly, "I want some money, and must have it from you or through you."

The coolness of his speech restored the colonel to his usual mood. He laughed unpleasantly and, raising his eyebrows, replied, "You wish me to become a mere tool in your hands?"

"Put it as you please."

"You think the result will be the same?"

"Yes," answered Glender, staring at him calmly as he spoke.

The colonel began to fear that through some means of



which he was unaware, this man held him in his power. He was anxious to arrive at a certainty concerning this surmise as quickly as possible, yet unwilling to betray his impatience.

"And supposing I decline to give, or aid you in obtaining money?"

"I have more faith in your sense than to credit your refusal."

"You are really too kind."

"Well I was kind to you once when I enabled you to pocket four thousand five hundred pounds. I may be able to serve you in a like manner again."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you see?" said Glender with a broad grin.

"I'm afraid I'm rather dull."

"Not you," replied Glender with some contempt, "but you want me to out with what's in my mind. Well, here it is. I'm ready to write a second cheque for the same amount, signed with your brother's name."

"You are very considerate."

"Be serious," cried Glender impatiently.

"Well, I had thought of this before I went abroad; even then the risk seemed too great, now it is out of the question."

"Why," asked Glender, anxious to hear his explanation, whilst unwilling to suffer disappointment in a scheme he evidently regarded with satisfaction.

The colonel hesitated before replying. It was apparent Glender had not betrayed him; nay, did not know the forged draft was under suspicion.

"Because my brother is inclined to believe the cheque you wrote a forgery."

"You didn't let me know this before."

"I was made aware of the fact only an hour ago."

"Tell me in what way. This concerns me as much as you; tell me about it, man."



"Lord Kerry sent me word he had reason to believe his father's name had been signed to a cheque drawn in my favour for five thousand pounds, and wished to know through what means it reached me."

"Sent you a message," said Glender wonderingly.

"Yes, by my cousin, Ulic Tarbert; you know him," he said, looking Glender in the face and watching the effect of his words.

"Not I," replied the other.

"Glender," he said, "deal fair with me. You know him."

"I swear to you I never set eyes on the man to my knowledge."

His tone convinced the colonel he spoke truth. "Then," said the latter, "he knows you."

"As Jacob Glender, that may be."

"No, as the Rev. Amos Berkeley."

Glender sat upright in his chair startled and dismayed, and for some seconds no word was spoken between them. At length he said, "It's scarcely possible he knows me."

"But he does."

"Why do you think so?"

"When I sent word to Lord Kerry I would defy any man to prove the cheque was not drawn by my father, Ulic asked me if I would defy the Rev. Amos Berkeley."

"What did you reply?"

"I said I had never heard the name before. He stated he had, and immediately left the room."

"Can it be that he knows me," said Glender in a tone of amazement.

"He has seen you."

"Don't speak in riddles, tell me where and when."

"In my rooms on the afternoon of the day I left for the continent. You may have noticed him there."

"A broad-shouldered young man?"



"Yes, that was he. When you had gone he said to Lane he knew your face, but couldn't remember your name, when Lane told him it was Jacob Glender. How he came to know your real name, or if he identifies you with it, I cannot say."

"There is something more in this than I can understand," Glender said musingly. "You have never mentioned our little business to any one, man or woman?"

"Do you think I'm an idiot?"

"Not naturally; but I know the cleverest men have been turned into fools by women."

"I dare say, but I haven't."

"Then if you have kept this transaction dark, Lord Kerry may suspect, but cannot prove the forgery."

"Yes, that is my great hope."

Glender hugged one knee with his strong-jointed fingers, and thought for some time, then said, "I think, in any case, I'm at the safe side of the hedge in this business. Even if Lord Kerry proved the signature to be mine, which is impossible, yet he couldn't prosecute me without dragging you into the scrape, and that he'll not do."

"He hates me, I'm sure; but I dare say he would hesitate before charging me with felony."

"Will you not try his forbearance further?"

"No," replied the colonel determinedly. "There is no man in whose clutches I would not rather place myself."

"You are anxious he should believe your father sent you the cheque?"

"Certainly. I mean to convince him it is genuine."

"How?" asked Glender.

"You wrote a letter purporting to come from my father, stating the money was inclosed. This will prove the old man complied with my wishes. If Lord



Kerry has doubts concerning the cheque, this note will help to vanquish them."

Jacob Glender grinned. "If he suspects the cheque to be a forgery, he will believe the letter to be so likewise."

"Suspicion is not conviction. I will defy him."

As Glender listened he grinned again more maliciously than before, and rubbed his face with the palm of his right hand.

"Has it ever struck you," he asked, "that you have had the best of this business all through?"

"I can't say it has; you were paid the price you asked for the assistance given."

"Yes; I made a bad bargain; but that's no reason why I should stick to it still," said Glender.

"I don't consider it a bad bargain, and I know you must rest satisfied with it now."

"There," remarked Glender, placing his hands on his knees, squaring his elbows, and thrusting forward his head, "you are mistaken."

Colonel Tarbert looked at him in surprise. "I don't understand you," he said coolly.

"No, but I'll very soon explain to you," remarked Glender drily.

"The sooner the better."

"I gave you five thousand pounds."

"You forged a cheque for that amount."

"You will split straws."

"I keep to the truth," answered the colonel.

"Be it so. You got five thousand pounds, deducting five hundred for me. Do you think that fair treatment?"

"Decidedly."

"Well, I don't. Why, man, if I hadn't been a downright fool I would have had half profits. That's what I'd call just; half risks, half profits," said Glender, working himself into anger.



"There was little risk for you."

"And much profit for you."

"There is no use in discussing the subject now," the colonel remarked, rising from his chair as if to end the conference.

"That remains to be seen," said Glender, "and I'd advise you to sit down and hear me." There was a ring of command in his tone which made his companion involuntarily obey him.

"Now," said Glender persuasively, though determinedly, "I'm in want of money. I have had a run of misfortune lately; one thing after another has failed me until I haven't a penny left. One can't expect his good luck to continue for ever, nor his ill luck either. This is my hard time, which I hope will come no more. Strange, isn't it, that here am I in the midst of a city notable for its enterprise among nations, I a clever and unscrupulous man, and I can't turn—I was about to say an honest penny—any kind of a penny; isn't it unfortunate?"

"Surely there is some way in which you could turn your exceptional talents to account?"

"Not, I fear, without putting my liberty in danger, and liberty is a boon which those who have known its loss can never despise."

"Have you thought of the stock exchange? There are some fine prizes to be drawn there I'm told, by one as liberal-minded as you. A man with an ability and a conscience like yours might after a couple of years' experience of Mark Lane buy a country residence and start a brougham."

"I have considered everything, but most of all have I thought of you."

"You do me too much honour," said the colonel superciliously.



"Not at all; you are a man of resources and expectations."

"In what way did you imagine I could assist you?"

"By drawing a cheque on your brother; his coffers are full; his generosity might be sufficient to pardon a liberty taken with his name."

"I tell you once and for all, this is impossible."

"And since receiving your answer another idea has occurred to me," continued Glender.

"I shan't touch dangerous ground."

"Nor shall I ask you."

"Then what do you mean?" asked the colonel.

"Simply that I have not been sufficiently paid for my former service. Give me five hundred pounds and I'll mention it no more."

"I shall do no such thing."

"Pray consider well before you decide."

"There is no consideration necessary."

"Then no resource is left for me but to act on my original thought."

"What may that be?" asked the colonel, feeling uneasy at his words.

"A short while ago you delicately referred to my conscience; I'm going to prove your estimate of it was not mistaken."

"Explain yourself?"

"I'll do anything to oblige you," replied Glender, his spirits rising as his companion's perplexity increased. "On the day I forged the cheque, you forgot your father's letter refused the money," said Jacob, concealing the fact he had seen it drop from the colonel's pocket and immediately secured it. "Since then it has remained in my possession; but in case you refuse the trifle I ask, I shall unwillingly be obliged to part with and forward it to your brother. It will confirm him in the doubt he already entertains."



Colonel Tarbert glared at him, utterly confounded by his audacity. He had missed the letter mentioned, but had attached no importance to its loss, never suspecting it had fallen into Glender's hands.

"What a thorough scoundrel you are," he said, recovering from his first surprise. Glender's brows contracted; his face wore an ugly look. "Show me the letter, or I shan't believe you have it," added the colonel, some hope dawning on him that Glender's statement of his possessing it was false.

Without a word Jacob rose from his chair, unlocked a drawer in a bureau, and produced the late Lord Kerry's letter. "There it is," he said, holding it before the colonel, but beyond his reach. "You are satisfied now, I hope."

"I am."

Glender replaced the letter, and relocked the drawer.

"Look here, Glender, what do you mean to do with that note?"

"To sell it to you for five hundred pounds; not a penny less."

"Nonsense. I can't buy it from you."

"Then I'll send it to your brother."

"You will not be such an ass as to place yourself in danger of the law."

"There is no danger; he'll not prosecute."

"But it won't put a penny in your pocket."

"No, but it will be revenge for not having five hundred pounds there."

"You are treating me unfairly."

"I'm sorry we entertain a difference of opinion on a subject which concerns us both so nearly."

"You'll never send it him?"

"If I don't have five hundred pounds for it from you I shall."



"Come, be reasonable. I'll give you a hundred for it now."

"I'll not take a farthing less than what I say," replied Glender, striving to suppress a smile of satisfaction. "The job I did for you was worth a clear thousand; I got half the sum; if you haven't the generosity to give me the balance, I'll wring it from you."

"That you never shall."

"We'll see. I'll give you a clear week from this day to think of my proposal. If you haven't brought me the cash by that time, I swear I shall send the note to your brother!" he said excitedly.

The colonel rose to depart, "I'm not to be frightened like a child," he remarked. "You have refused a good offer which shall not be repeated."

He turned and left the room without another word.

"I'll have my money sure," said Glender to himself, and as he listened to the colonel's footsteps descending the stairs, he laughed aloud. "He has nibbled at the bait; he'll swallow the hook before a week has passed," he added, pouring out some brandy and water, and drinking to his own good health.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### A PRIVATE VISIT.

WITHIN a week of his interview with Jacob Glender, Colonel Tarbert paid another visit to his accomplice's rooms. His call on this occasion was made before midday, and was not paid at Glender's request. Nor had the colonel announced his coming. His movements seemed characterized by indecision. Before



entering the house he had glanced cautiously up and down the street, as if expecting or fearing the approach of some one he sought or avoided; and on reaching the stairs leading to Glender's apartments he paused to ascertain if conversation were being carried on within.

Satisfied by the unbroken silence that the rooms were either empty or merely occupied by one person, he approached the door and rapped softly. A voice within immediately bade him enter, and crossing the threshold he stood face to face with Jacob Glender's wife. Her frank open countenance betrayed a surprise that suddenly gave place to delight; then as if remembering herself, she quickly assumed an air and look of coldness and reserve.

Colonel Tarbert removed his hat and held out his hand, looking round the room meanwhile. "I suppose you didn't expect me," he said in a tone of familiarity which only a long standing acquaintance could have warranted.

"I wasn't aware you had returned," she answered, lowering her eyes before his fixed gaze.

"Glender didn't tell you?"

"He never mentioned your name to me."

"Is he out?"

"Yes; he has gone to Tattersall's."

The colonel seemed relieved at the news. Coming close to where she stood he suddenly stooped down and would have kissed her, but she quickly drew back. For a second he regarded her with a look of disappointment. "What," he said, "have you changed in so short a time?" She made no reply. "I thought," he continued, "if I came at this hour I might have my usual good luck in finding you alone."

"It's very good of you to come, but—but——" she stammered, and a blush dyed her cheeks as she raised her eyes timidly, reproachfully to his.



He laughed at her confusion in a tolerant triumphant way, and carrying two chairs from the wall, placed them near where she stood. "Now," he said, seating himself on one of them and pointing to the other, "Sit down here, and tell me what you have heard."

His looks fascinated her; the angry thoughts concerning him which she had for months harboured in her mind vanished at the mere sound of his voice; the reproaches she would have uttered failed her in his presence. Now he was beside her she found it impossible to suppress a sensation of pleasure wildly throbbing in her heart, because of his return. But she was resolved he should not witness her delight, and therefore strove to restrain its outward expression.

"Now," he said, "aren't you glad to see me again?"

"No," she answered, briefly, lest her voice might betray the falsity of her words if she denied her pleasure at greater length.

He smiled at the deception she would have practised. "May I ask why?" he said.

"You know well enough," she replied.

"Indeed, I am not aware of anything which could change your feelings towards me," he said, quite gravely.

She looked at him surprisedly. "Surely you will not deny you have gone away with—with a married lady."

"Tell me all you have heard, and I will be perfectly frank with you."

"Only what I have said, and there is no use denying it, for I read it in the papers, and heard Glender talk of it, and—and—" she concluded with a sob in her throat, "I thought I should have died."

A cruel light, such as might gleam in the eyes of a beast playing with its prey, spread over his face. "And you believed the slanders of those wicked society papers?" he asked in tones of reproach.



"I did, and I do ; and I hated you, and hoped I should never see you again."

"I didn't think," he replied in a low key, as best befitted the sorrow he would express, "you could have been so cruel."

"It was you who were cruel," she answered, striving to keep back her tears. "You who often said here in this room, there was no woman in the world you loved but me. It was wrong of me to hear you say it, foolish to have believed it, and I was punished as I deserved." The storm of tears which had been long threatened and hardly subdued, at last burst forth, and she cried bitterly.

He waited until her emotion had somewhat subsided, and then said :

"You mistake my meaning. It was cruel of you to believe what the world said, because I am innocent of its charges."

Her sobs suddenly ceased ; she turned and looked at him in wonder and doubt. "Didn't you go abroad with her ?" she asked, intense eagerness in her voice.

"I did," he replied.

She turned away disheartened. If he had denied it she could have believed his word against the world ; but he admitted the fact, and her heart was sore.

"Don't judge me until you have heard all," he pleaded.

"I don't care to hear any more," she said sadly and wearily.

"Very well," he answered, sighing as he rose ; "I must bear your censure as I have borne that of others ; but 'tis hard you should think me guilty."

She looked at him imploringly, but his experiences of women's natures made him fear it would lessen the effect he desired to produce if he explained without persuasion. He therefore took up his hat as if to



depart, when she rising from her chair cried out pitifully :

“No, no, you mustn’t go without telling me all. Think what I have suffered these months past, and yet you would leave me without speaking a word that might bring me peace. How hard and unkind you are, and oh, how weak and foolish am I.”

“But you would not hear.”

“Even if I said so you should have made me hear. Have you no heart?”

He saw the moment had come when she was ready to implicitly believe any statement that should vouch for his affection towards her, and he spoke accordingly.

“To explain my position,” he began, “I must give a brief chapter of a family history. Amerton married his wife against the consent of her only relative, an old aunt. The marriage was on his part, simply a speculation, for her fortune was large, and he had nothing save what he made by writing books. They hadn’t been three months wedded when he began to treat her in the most infamous manner, locked her up for days, and ’tis said, used physical violence towards her.”

His hearer thought of her own sad fate, and sighed for sympathy with this much distressed lady.

“Every one declared it was shameful, but she had no relatives to interfere, her aunt having by this time married again and settled down abroad. To her, Mrs. Amerton at last resolved to escape, but she had neither money nor experience of travelling, and in her despair she appealed to me, as an old friend of the family, for help. I agreed, but pictured the construction a censorious world would place upon her act. She was in too much trouble to heed this ; indeed she hoped her husband might seek a divorce if she fled with another man. It was not for me to shrink from saving a wronged and helpless woman, though my reputation



might pay the penalty. Accordingly I acted as her guardian, until I placed her under the protection of her aunt. As I was abroad, I continued to travel for a while, and only a few days since returned to town."

He feared this lie was over gross even for his victim to believe, but trusted her infatuation would blind her to its absurdity; nor was he deceived. Every assertion made regarding his disinterested chivalry found some confirming response in her heart. She had thirsted to hear an explanation so satisfactory. Mentally, she blamed herself for the injustice with which she had treated him: like the world of which he complained, she had wrongfully censured him. When he had finished speaking she uplifted a face clear of suspicions as the morning sky of clouds, and said reproachfully, "Why didn't you tell me this before; it would have saved me much pain; and then to think I believed you so wicked for three whole months; but I was miserable and often wished I was dead."

He took one of her hands in his and kissed its tapering fingers.

"The plan was arranged so suddenly," he said, "I had neither time to nor opportunity of telling you; even if I had I would have been afraid to trust our secret to anyone, lest escape might be prevented. And above all I was anxious to know you had faith enough in me to discredit the slanderous reports you might hear."

"And I hadn't," she said in bitter self reproach.

"No," he replied, with a leer of satisfaction at her blind belief in him, "all women are the same, jealous and cruel."

"Don't you forgive me," she pleaded in a voice whose sound might have melted a heart less hardened. "You know if—if—I didn't care for you, I should not mind your going away with another woman."



"Of course not," he answered lightly, and then added in a more serious voice: "I wonder if the day will come when you will trust me to take care of you for life."

She rose up, and removing her chair to its former place, stood resting against it whilst she replied in a troubled tremulous voice:

"You promised you would never speak to me in this manner again."

He laughed at her words, and at the strange confusion in which they were uttered, looking at her with his heavy-lidded eyes, as a serpent might at the bird it had fascinated.

"Never is a long time; and you know——"

"Don't say any more," she pleaded.

"Not if it displeases you, but you know I love you."

Her face became crimson.

She looked at the little round brass clock on the chimney-piece, and he followed the direction of her eyes. He had now sufficiently prepared the way for the object of his visit.

"Glender may be back at any moment," she said nervously. "You had better go."

"Very well," he replied, rising. "By-the way," he continued, as if a thought had just flashed on him, "Glender has a letter of mine which I dropped here one day. Have you noticed it amongst his papers?"

"I shouldn't know it if I had. Have you asked him for it?"

"Yes; but he refuses to give it back, just to vex me, of course, he is fond of a joke sometimes. It's of no value to him, indeed it's of no consequence to me either, only it being the last letter my father wrote me, I should like to keep it for his sake."

"Surely Glender doesn't know this," she asked indignantly.



"He does; but you're aware he's a strange man for whose whims there is no accounting."

"It is wrong of him; why don't you insist on his giving it back to you?"

"Oh I don't want to quarrel with him about a trifle, but I'll tell you what you might do for me; if you see the note—you will know it by the heavy writing and the signature, Kerry; keep it safe for me."

"Glender never leaves his papers about, but always keep them locked in the drawer of that bureau."

"He has a nice collection, I have no doubt," said the colonel with a sneer.

"I have never seen them."

"My letter is, I dare say, amongst them," he said, as if he were not already aware of the fact. Then looking earnestly at her, he continued: "Could you not get it for me?"

"I fear it would be impossible; he always carries the key about him."

"Even when he's asleep—or drunk? Now if, when you found an opportunity, you took the key from his pocket, obtained possession of the letter, and replaced the key, he would never know or never suspect that you had interfered. Is it too much to ask if you will do this for my sake. If so, don't attempt it; but if you would, I shall think myself indebted to you for life."

"I'll do it," she said, after a slight pause, and her face brightened with resolution. "I'll do my best for you."

She would run greater risks to please him.

"And no woman can do more," he replied.

She looked once more towards the clock. How quickly the minute-hand had moved.

"I'm off," he said, noticing her glance. "When may I expect to hear from you?"

"I can't say; it depends on my opportunities."



"If we wait for them, they always come."

"Then I shall await mine. Don't stay longer, I am so nervous, fearing he might return."

"What if he did. I'd simply say I had come to see him."

"Better go," she replied; "better leave me at once."

"You are afraid of him?" he asked.

"I have reason to be."

"Well, I'll away at once."

He took her hand and pressed it fervidly. She turned away her head, and without another word he departed.

Left alone, she sat down wearily in the chair nearest her, thinking of all that had passed within the last hour. A sense of satisfaction rose in her heart when she dwelt on the refutation Colonel Tarbert had given the scandals concerning him. She recalled his words of explanation, the tones of his voice, the look in his eyes. Then some idea came to her of the wrong her love for him dealt her husband which was quickly merged in the general misery she felt.

She sat dreaming for almost half an hour, when a heavy and somewhat uncertain step was heard slowly ascending the stair; and a moment later Glender stood in the doorway. She had awaited his appearance eagerly, apprehensively, and now looked at him with fear and disgust. All signs of intelligence which in his periods of sobriety kept the brutal expression of his face in abeyance, had vanished; the animal predominated over the man. His eyes, sunken under his massive forehead, glared ferociously; his coarse lips twitched ominously; his hard crowned hat was perched on the back of his head, his scarf pushed awry, the upper part of his waistcoat opened.

Neither spoke for some time. Each regarded the other. Self-pity rose in her mind at being condemned



to live with this man, and some dim vision of life with another flashed before her.

Muttering an oath, Glender reeled into the room, and supported himself against the centre-table. She did not stir, but sat quietly and fearfully, numbed to inaction by dread.

"What are you looking at?" he said, in a low tone; and receiving no answer cried in a voice of thunder, "I say, why are you staring at me, eh?"

Her heart sank; her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth from terror. All the savage instincts of his nature triumphed; reason being dethroned, the rebellious hell within him broke forth in exultation.

"You won't answer me, won't you?" he said, malignantly. "You want me to teach you manners, do you?"

She looked towards the door, wondering if she could escape; but courage deserting her heart, physical strength failed her limbs, and she sat there powerless to move.

"Come here," he cried.

She could not move, and with an oath, he reeled across the floor to where she sat. Then she rose, feeling herself as helpless to avoid danger as a dreamer to escape a phantom pursuit.

"What are you afraid of, eh?" he roared, and with a quick movement caught her by the arm. She screamed from the sudden pain inflicted by his grasp.

"You devil," he cried, raising his clenched fist and aiming a blow at her head. Instinctively she put up her arm, and his hand descending on it with vigour, and striking it forcibly against her forehead, she fell to the ground stunned and helpless.

The brutal instinct uppermost in his nature at that moment was appeased; he tottered to the next room,



flung himself on his bed, and was soon deep in drunken slumbers.

On the evening succeeding the day of this occurrence, Colonel Tarbert sat smoking a cigarette after dinner in his rooms at Piccadilly, when Lane entered with a mysterious air, and said:

"A lady wishes to see you, sir."

"Didn't she give her name?" his master asked.

"No, sir; she merely said a friend wished to see you."

"Friends are many," he replied musingly. "Wonder who she can be?"

For a second it flashed upon him this visitor might be Mrs. Amerton, but on second thoughts he knew from the circumstances of their parting a visit from her would be impossible.

"Show her into the sitting-room," he said to Lane, and then finishing his coffee, rose from the table.

On entering the adjoining apartment he was surprised and pleased to behold Jacob Glender's wife. "It is you," he said. "Why didn't you give your name, that I might come to you at once?"

"I don't want any one to know I called," she replied in a timid voice. From excitement her colour had brightened, her blue eyes sparkled, her fair fluffy hair hung in picturesque disorder on her forehead.

"Why, you are quite in a flutter; no one shall know you came here."

"If Glender knew," she said, whilst a look of terror crossed her face, "I'm sure he'd kill me."

"Would he? Well, there is no danger. Sit down here," he added, moving to a lounge; when she had obeyed him he took a seat beside her.

"I have got the letter," she said, "and I brought it to you for safety."

"You have," he exclaimed. "Ah if you knew how this relieves me——"



"Relieves you," she repeated, in astonishment.

"Pleases me, I mean. Where is it, let me see it," he said anxiously.

She rose up, walked away a few steps with her back towards him, unhooked the neck of her dress, and fastened it again when she had withdrawn the note from its hiding place. "Here it is," she said, turning and handing him his father's letter.

"How can I thank you?" he asked, running his eye over the lines, and then, satisfied it was the note he required, crushing it in triumph in his hand. "How did you manage to secure it?"

"Shortly after your departure Glender came in drunk."

"How fortunate," he said.

She looked at him reproachfully, but instantly forgave his selfishness, because he was ignorant of her sufferings.

"When he went to bed I took the key of the bureau from his pocket, and with fear and trembling opened the drawer. My nervousness was so great lest at any moment he might rouse up. I couldn't at first find this letter, but I got it at last. In the afternoon he woke, but soon drank himself to sleep again, and the first moment I thought it safe to leave I came to you."

Some faint idea of her devotion dawned on his mind.

"Was there ever such a clever little woman?" he said; then, thinking of Glender's disappointment and rage on missing the note, he laughed aloud.

"You are glad to have it?" she said, not quite understanding his merriment.

"Glad. It is worth five hundred pounds to me."

"Five hundred pounds," she echoed, not daring to consider the consequences which might follow discovery of its abstraction. She had thought Glender kept it merely to thwart the colonel, and only now divined it was valuable to him. "You told me," she said faintly,



"it was merely because of its being your father's last letter you wished to have it."

"Yes," he replied without embarrassment, "I believed so at the time, but reading it over I see Glender could have made money by it. Filial devotion, you see, has had its reward."

She was too much surprised and occupied with her thoughts to make immediate reply. She had no doubt of the colonel's words. She wondered how it would be possible for her to live with Glender whilst fear of his suspicions being directed towards her as the thief hung above her as a sword suspended by a hair. Here was a new weight suddenly added to the burden of her life. Her days had been full of misery before, but now this new terror would render existence intolerable.

"Why do you look so scared?" the colonel asked.

"Because," she replied, "I had not thought this letter was important, and I dread Glender's anger when he misses it, as he surely will."

"Why return to him?"

At his words the room swam round her, and she put up her hands to her face. As she did, the loose sleeve of her cloak fell back, leaving a livid mark clearly visible on the lower part of her arm. The colonel's eyes rested on the discoloured flesh for a second.

"Did he do this?" he asked.

"Yes," she briefly replied, bending her head in shame.

"What a brute the fellow is." Then into his cold grey eyes came a gleam of satisfaction. This blow would certainly plead in his favour against Glender. "You have borne too much from such a wretch," he said, "leave him and let me protect you from this day forward."

"No, no," she replied, weakly enough because of her inward struggle. "It cannot be."



"It must be," he answered determinedly. "I know you care for me, and there is no woman in the world I love better than you."

"I can't help caring for you," she replied; "you are the only friend I have in the world. I did wrong in coming here to-night, but I thought only of serving you. Surely you will not make me repent this act?"

The agony of contending emotions found expression in her voice. He turned away, defeated by her appeal.

"I was mistaken," he said; "I thought you cared for me, that you would be glad to escape from that beast."

"He is my husband," she said simply.

Colonel Tarbert laughed aloud, feeling now assured of his triumph, and his voice sounded as devilish mockery in her ears.

"Your husband," he repeated. "Do you know nothing of his past life?"

"Nothing," she answered, feeling scared by the question.

"Where did you first meet him?"

"In Wiltshire. He came to the great house of our village with some horses he had bought for the squire. I was a farmer's daughter—his only child—and—and I married Glender against my father's wish, and I have been punished well."

"Did you make no inquiries concerning his former life?"

"No. Loving him I trusted him."

"Then I know more of him than you. His name is not Jacob Glender, and you are not his wife."

"You are mistaken," she said, her face flushing scarlet; "we were married in the village church."

"At the same time he had a wife living."

"Is this true?" she asked, her heart throbbing with anxiety. "Is this true, or do you wish to deceive me for your own ends? Be merciful," she continued im-



ploringly. "I have done what lay in my power for you. I ask you in return to tell me the truth."

"I solemnly swear Jacob Glender is a bigamist, and that you are not his wife. I can prove it if necessary," he replied in an earnest tone.

She believed his words.

"Then," she exclaimed, whilst a smile of exultation lighted up her face, "I am free."

"You are," he answered.

In another instant the light faded from her features, a wild troubled look came into her eyes, her head dropped on her breast.

"If," she cried, "I am not his wife, then what am I?"

He answered, "The woman I love best in the world."

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## CHAPTER XX.

### PHILIP AMERTON RETURNS.

ONE bleak, wet evening towards the end of March, Philip Amerton arrived from Paris at Charing Cross station. Through the blurred windows of his cab as he drove towards Kensington, he saw lines of dripping wayfarers passing under the glare of yellow street lamps and disappearing, phantom-like, into shadows beyond. Brilliant lights from shops flashed on him as he sped onwards: the hour sounding from a church clock, slowly and with muffled sounds seemed as the tolling of a passing bell. The sky was one mass of unbroken blackness, rain fell with a heavy, monotonous splash.

It seemed to Amerton as if nature's cheerless mood sympathized with his melancholy mind. Desolation



reigned within, dreariness without, darkness and despair above and below.

Arriving at his house and entering the once familiar and now empty rooms, his keen sense of oppression increased. The days when he had lived here seemed long removed by years of pain. The change three months had wrought in him was great. Lines of care had marked his forehead; weariness looked from his eyes; his hair, before just sprinkled with grey, was now white at the temples. All traces of youth had vanished.

After a light dinner he flung himself listlessly on a couch in the study. Even this pleasant room, where so many creations of his brain had sprung into vigorous life and dwelt with him, where he had dreamt strange waking dreams, had welcomed hopes as pleasant guests, had peopled the air with anxious longings, now seemed desolate as a charnel house. The rows of familiar books on the shelves, friends who had invariably cheered him, were powerless to exercise their old charm. He turned from them with aversion.

It was he who had changed, not they; something had gone from his life, and the future could never be as the past. Could he but cast himself adrift from every association of the present and begin life anew, how firmly would he tread its road; how different a course would he pursue. Aye, it was ever the same; no man looks back upon his existence with satisfaction. Of the countless numbers who had risen from nothingness to return to oblivion, was there one who, if choice were given him, would tread the same path again? But the way once begun must be continued. Was it only when born again, man might traverse a new course? Mingling with such thoughts came a consciousness that Benoni was approaching; and this belief growing clearer and more clear, he rose from



the sofa, anxious and expectant. Before he had time to cross the floor the door opened softly and the mystic entered.

"Peace be on you," he said in the dulcet tones of his passionless voice.

Amerton made no immediate reply. A sense of anger rose in his heart against this man, who could have warned him of his trouble and was silent, who could have aided him in his search and was passive, who could have comforted him in his grief and was absent. Therefore he said, "You wish me peace whilst you know there is misery in my heart."

"My friend," Benoni answered gently, "I would your fate had been other than it has been."

Amerton looked at him keenly. The soft lamplight fell upon the mystic, bringing the outlines of his shapely head and the curves of his robe into strong relief. In his face rested an expression of patient sorrow; in his eyes, where the shadow of an older day lingered, dwelt tender compassion. Resentment waned in Philip's mind.

"Why," he asked reproachfully, "did you desert me? You must have seen my trouble approaching and yet you spoke no warning word."

"That is true," replied Benoni. "It was not permitted that I should serve you then; to test your strength it was necessary you should bear the trial unaided." He seated himself on a low ottoman near Amerton, and continued: "When some years ago you came to me in Africa, and asked me to solve experiences which perplexed you, and later besought Amuni the Faithful One to show you the pathway leading towards light, you but obeyed a dictate of your nature impossible to resist. That within you urged you forward to seek the sacred mysteries of life and death. But these cannot be obtained by those



who are not prepared to endure with patience and grow strong in spirit. You have suffered and thus taken the first step towards the attainment of your desires."

"But surely," said Philip, "you might have warned me."

"I should have but inflicted additional pain on you."

"Was there no escape?"

"None indeed," replied the mystic.

"Then I was destined to meet humiliation and pain."

Benoni looked at him with mingled pity and affection in his gaze.

"A child," he said in his low sonorous voice, "is grieved for a broken toy or is humiliated by correction."

"But you don't compare my wrongs to a child's grievances?"

"His sorrows are as real and bitter to him as your afflictions are to you. It is only when time has passed he reviews his distress with wonder, seeing the pettiness of its cause. So will it be with you. Ten years hence you will regard this grief desolating your life with equanimity; forty years later you will remember it with indifference as an item in your fate. Then shall you look back upon the brightness and darkness of your existence as one regards the lights and shadows chequering his pathway through woods in spring. How futile seem woe and joy, weighed with the consideration that all men are as shadows that fade and as vapours that flee away."

Amerton could make no reply.

"Think, my friend," continued the mystic, earnestly, "of your existence but as a journey towards a goal, on which hardships must be suffered by the way. You



are now but working out the fulfilment of your fate. Remember, those who would ascend must suffer; affliction is the flame which purifies; pain teaches compassion."

"Have you known sorrows?"

"Who has not?" replied Benoni. "Many and great were my griefs. Human nature is the same in every clime, in every age. I have tasted the sweetness of love and the bitterness of its betrayal. Friends who were the light of my life passed into other spheres, leaving me lone; those I had served with favours repaid me with ingratitude. But now have I risen above affliction and triumphed over pain. Misfortune cannot compass, distress overwhelm, nor disappointment assail me, because the things of the world are as nought to my senses, and man's life seems but a dream. Before this stage is reached affliction must have crucified the senses; self must be conquered, slain and entombed."

Philip was silent, pondering on the words he had heard; then his thoughts gradually drifted towards his present grief, and he asked, "Where is she, where is my wife?"

"Not far removed from you."

"She is in London?"

"Yes. A month since she parted from him who tempted her to leave her home. She is oppressed by affliction because of her sin; her affection for you, blinded awhile by passion for another, is renewed, and her heart is turned towards you."

"Then take me to her," Philip cried, rising to his feet.

Benoni raised his hands significantly.

"This is cruel. Let me assure her I forgive her all; let me acknowledge the fault was mine," he said in a voice full of suppressed feeling.



"Affliction is wholesome."

"Be human and have compassion on her, on me."

"My friend," answered the mystic gently, "have patience."

Amerton walked up and down the room, not trusting himself to speak lest he might use words he would subsequently regret.

Benoni surveyed him in silence for some seconds, then said, "You have yet much to overcome before the power you seek is given you."

Amerton paused to hear; the fascination Benoni had ever exercised over him had lost none of its old force.

"Even now temptation threatens to turn you aside from the road you would tread. Beware. That grief has fallen on you should bring you gladness of spirit, for sorrow deepens the sources of man's nature, widens the channels of his sympathies, softens and subdues his heart, fits him for a better and a purer life. My friend, the period of your probation has not yet passed. The heart must be withdrawn from desires of the senses. The cravings of your nature are as rungs in a ladder, which surmounted lead to celestial life."

Philip listened to him calmly. "The path I would pursue is rugged indeed," he said.

"Before have I reminded you 'narrow is the way.' I came here to-day that you may be warned. Give heed to my words that your future may be glad. Bear your sorrow with patience; subdue your desires with firmness, and all things you crave shall be yours. And now, my friend, must I depart. May peace reign in your heart."

The mystic folded his hands across his breast, bowed low, and quietly went his way. His words rang in Amerton's ears; some fear of his own weakness rose phantom-like in the silence of his thoughts. Surely



he would not turn back from the path he had begun to tread. Promises of mystic power and occult lore lured him onwards to regions of mystery; human affection and natural sympathies besought his return to earth; torn by conflicting emotions he stood irresolute. Now had the hour come for his decision. He rose from his chair impatiently. The quiet of night, contrasting his internal conflict, made him ill at ease. A feeling of restlessness he was powerless to subdue gradually took possession of him, and though physically weary he knew repose was now impossible.

He strode backwards and forwards, his pulse quickening, wild thoughts surging through his brain. The restraint placed upon his movements by the limits of the room became unendurable. The very atmosphere seemed to stifle and oppress him, he fancied he could scarce breathe, he was tempted to cry aloud.

Sitting down, he endeavoured to calm the feverish unrest besetting him, but in vain. The blood surged quickly through his veins, his temples throbbed, his hands trembled, the shaded lamp-light dazzled his sight, dim shadows in distant corners became tremulous with movement, he feared to turn suddenly lest his eyes might encounter some weird and horrible sight in progress of shaping itself from darkness, he dared not sit still, the air was filled with whispering voices whose messages he strove to comprehend. His senses grew dim to external objects only to perceive more plainly and hear more distinctly visions and sounds beyond the filmy boundary of this world; the room, nay the earth sped round him, and for a second he was in profound darkness; then with a sudden bound, he had escaped the trammels of self, and limitless space and happy radiance disclosed itself before him, teeming with millions of bodiless phantoms, of which he was one, like unto them. Countless words hung in air;



the earth in which his body rested was as a little globe low down in endless chaos; distance became annihilated at will; freedom surrounded him; music such as mortal ear had never heard surged in billows of sound across this shoreless sea of light. And above all was made manifest the awful and mystic presence of the imperishable Breath of Life, unseen, yet permeating all, guiding and governing in perfect harmony the worlds of spirit and matter, of thought and action.

Through all was he conscious of his natural frame, to which he yet was bound; and out of his connection with mortality came inexpressible fear. And as one drowning greatly struggles for life, so did he vigorously strive to regain his former condition. Then swiftly he passed through darkness back to earthly existence: soul and body became reunited, consciousness of his immediate surroundings returned. Feeling his way towards the window of his study, he threw up the sash and leaned forward; cold, damp winds playing on his face restored him.

The rain had ceased; rugged-edged clouds drifted hurriedly past a watery moon; a clock at some distance struck ten. He resolved to leave the house; fresh air and quiet would calm him; he would mingle with darkness and lose himself; his feverish thoughts would find sympathy with the clouds fleeting in wild confusion into space.

He closed the window, drew down the blind, and leaving the lamp alight hurried out into the night. Where he went he neither knew nor cared. The few persons he met seemed as phantoms looming before him, advancing, and passing into shade. Silence fell upon all things; he walked as through an enchanted city; the misty atmosphere was as a vapour created by a magic spell, making all sights seem unreal; the street lamps, glaring dimly through dense obscurity,



were as spectral lights to which distance lent grotesque shapes and changeful effects. Once or twice voices and laughter of men and women near at hand reached him, and the sounds, following him as he sped, rang in his ears as the jubilant mockeries of demons holding unholy revels.

He had been walking for upwards of an hour, when fate guided him back to the spot from which he started. His pace had been rapid, and he felt his bodily fatigue must overcome his mental restlessness. If his jaded senses could but find oblivion in deep sleep, all would be well; his whole nature cried for rest, and peace seemed denied him.

As he turned into the Campden Hill Road, the stealthy movement of a dark object arrested his attention. For a moment he fancied his senses had betrayed him, but looking again he saw a woman's figure wrapped in a black cloak, and even at that distance something in its outlines seemed strangely familiar to his sight. He paused in doubt and wonder. She whom he watched stood at the opposite side of his house, well sheltered by projecting trees, her head upraised towards the dimly lighted window of his study. It was none other than his wife. She had not heard or seen him advance. He gazed at her with every nerve strained. Forgetful of all else, it seemed to him as if they two stood alone in all the world. The wrong she had dealt, the misery she had caused him were forgotten; he but remembered she had loved him once. No thought of resentment came to the surface of his mind; his, he felt assured, was the blame.

After long search and sorrow, it was strange indeed they should meet here on the threshold of their home. He never removed his eyes from her, lest she should vanish, and he was determined they should part no more. For a while she steadily watched the lighted



window, then bowed her head; he fancied a tremulous movement shook her frame, the sound of a sob reached his ear. In a little while she looked upwards again, and then moved slowly away in an opposite direction. With many feelings struggling for mastery he followed, and coming close whispered her name.

A low cry broke from her lips; she had recognized his voice; she spoke no word or made no sign, but hastened her pace as if she would flee. Philip came beside her, and gently placed one hand on her arm.

"Miriam," he said, "don't you know me?"

She stood still, unable to stir; he could not see her face because of her heavy veil, but he felt she was struggling with herself. In a second she had mastered her voice, and he heard her say:

"Don't speak to me. Forgive my coming near your home. I promise you shall never see me again."

"And I promise," he said, sadly yet determinedly, "I shall never lose sight of you more."

She was silent a moment, not understanding the drift of his meaning. "No," she replied, "I have severed myself from my past for ever. Let me endure the misery I deserve."

"We both have erred, and we both have suffered," he said. "I have acted wrongly by you, and I have been punished."

"Have you suffered because of me?" she asked quickly. She turned towards him as if she would look into his face and read the confirmation of his words there, but they stood in shadow, and she could not see. His voice, however, told her much: he had changed.

"It was I who inflicted the wrong, and the penalty should be mine alone," she said.

"Do you not know," he asked, "I have searched for you from the day you departed? Only to-night have I returned, and I find you."



"Searched for me?" she replied, as if a revelation flashed on her.

"You are yet my wife, and having done wrong I hold it my duty to win you back to right, rescue you from sin, shelter you from the world, share with you my home."

"And you," she said with a world of self-reproach in her voice, "you are the man whom I deserted, miserable dupe that I have been." Her voice ended in a sob, and she cried bitterly, "Your words," she continued, "are more than I can bear. I felt I had become a burden to your life, that you had made a mistake in marrying me, and I fancied you would be glad to have an opportunity of freeing yourself from me. I left you, but soon woke from my dream, and I have since been punished for my guilt. I don't shrink from my chastisement. That I have spoken to you now is more than I deserve. But we shall never meet again. I intended to leave England, change my name, and in a new land begin life afresh. I could not depart without seeing you once more, and thought I might one night watch you unobserved as you entered or left your home. I have come here regularly for weeks. To-night for the first time I saw a light in your room, and I waited, hoping I might see your shadow on the blind. I have avoided since my return all those I once knew, and did not know where you were."

"I have been seeking you through Italy."

"Since awakening from my evil dream," she said, "you have been ever in my mind. For I began to feel I had, in assuring myself I freed you from a burden, but blinded my conscience to the depths of my wickedness. I became aware right should never come through wrong. I wanted to tell you of my repentance, and if I had caused you pain to beg forgive-



ness. I thought if there was truth in the teachings of Benoni you must know my feelings, and one evening my heart went out to you, and I fancied you were conscious of all I would say."

"I saw you, Miriam, plain as I see you now, but when I cried out you vanished."

"This is strange indeed," she said; and then remembering herself, added, "Can you forgive me?"

"I have forgiven you long ago. The conclusions you drew regarding me were just. I imagined I had made a mistake in marrying. My punishment came in your desertion, for on your departure I found I had loved you all the while."

"This is too much happiness for me to hear," she said gently, "I have never been worthy of you; am least worthy of you now."

"Which of us has not erred?" he asked; then added, "Come back to me."

Of all reproaches she had felt since leaving him, that conveyed in his words was hardest to hear, bitterest to bear. He, indeed was brave, but heaven would strengthen her to act likewise and refuse a generosity which would shadow his life.

"No, Philip," she answered, "we must part. I have brought shame, and, as you tell me, sorrow upon you, and it were better the living memory of your wrongs was not for ever before you. I understand your self-sacrifice, but I shall not profit by it. You will never see me again. God bless you and make you happy, dear. And now good-bye."

She moved away quickly, but he stretched out his arm and held her. "You shall not go," he said gravely.

She broke into a storm of tears. When she had recovered a little he continued:

"You are still my wife, and I love you yet. The



past shall be forgotten from this hour. Return with me to our home."

"What will the world say?" she asked, her resolution giving way before his stronger determination,

"That matters little to me. If I grieve, will the world console me? If I am lonely, will the world comfort me? If I suffer misfortune, will the world pity me?"

"O noble heart," she cried, "how have I wronged you."

"Our lives once united, must not be severed. From this day shall we begin existence anew, and from experiences of the past strive to guide our future."

She bowed her head in silence and consent.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### WHAT HAVE I DONE?

It happened on a certain evening towards the end of May, Colonel Tarbert dined alone at his club. He had seated himself before a little table in a snug corner of the dining-room, where he was likely to be most free from observation and secure from disturbance. The choice dinner he had ordered and eaten, the rare wines he had selected and drank helped to make him satisfied with himself and content with the world at large. Dessert being finished he lay back in his chair, his broad chest expanded, his hands buried in his trousers pockets, his thick lips parted in a sneer.

Man knows no more pleasant task than that of crediting himself with cleverness and congratulating himself on success; and Colonel Tarbert was just now engaged in this delightful occupation. It was a source



of pride and glory to him, he had outwitted Jacob Glender in the game that sharper would have played.

Through a stratagem unsuspected by his rival, he had gained the letter which would have, he thought, confirmed Lord Kerry in his belief of the forgery, the colonel being unaware of the entries in his father's diary which already pointed towards such a conclusion. Moreover he had revenged himself on Glender by taking from him the woman he had called his wife. This latter act heightened the pleasure of the former; endowed the mere fact of obtaining the letter, with a tinge of adventure, if not of romance. He emptied his champagne glass and lit a cigar with a keen sense of internal satisfaction. Lately his luck on the turf being good, he had been enabled to pay his most pressing debts and renew bills for the remainder. Then news had reached him that Lord Kerry had suffered from another paralytic stroke which placed his life in greater peril than before. The children of Israel having caught rumour of this intelligence, were more liberal in their dealings with the colonel. Altogether he felt content with his present lot, and hopeful of his future life.

The only shadow which crossed his path, was that cast by the figure of Jacob Glender, but even this by no means affrighted him. The fellow was certainly, Colonel Tarbert considered, in his power; he could at any moment by exposing his past life, and denouncing him as a returned convict, ruin his career as a sporting prophet. Men, no matter how unscrupulous themselves, generally shrink from a gaol-bird. But this would be an extreme measure which he hoped he might not be forced to take.

Since the evening on which the letter had been recovered, he had not seen Glender, having taken all possible care to avoid him, and to secure from his knowledge the home of her he called his wife. The



district Colonel Tarbert had selected for his residence was respectable Wimbledon. Here under the name of Captain Turner, he had taken apartments for Mrs Turner in a comfortable old-fashioned mansion, secluded from the high road and removed from the track of London holiday-makers. Bearing Jacob Glender in mind, it had been the colonel's habit to avoid the vicinity of Wimbledon as much as possible during daylight, and select such routes on his way thither, as he considered least frequented. Notwithstanding these precautions, it had seemed on several occasions he had been watched. Once indeed when he had taken the train from Waterloo Station, a man, who from his dress and appearance was evidently connected with the turf, entered his carriage and alighted with him at Wimbledon. This would not have aroused Colonel Tarbert's suspicions if he had not subsequently observed the same individual in his wake. He therefore took a route different from that he had intended following, avoided the house where Mrs. Turner awaited him, and after a short walk returned to town.

He would have felt more at ease had Glender come in fury to demand satisfaction in pounds, shillings and pence; but with the passage of time Colonel Tarbert's apprehension became quieted, and he strove to persuade himself Glender in no way associated him with the woman's disappearance. Whatever uneasiness he had once felt, was set completely at rest to-night. He had dined well and drank freely, and his digestion, which he was pleased to call his conscience, was in excellent condition.

"There is only one thing wanting to complete the happiness of the just-dined," he thought, as he pushed back his chair. "The knowledge that poor Kerry was safe in Heaven or——" and he paused. "If only I had plenty of money," he continued, when the grim smile



accompanying his last train of ideas had passed away, "I would become a respectable man; I'm just fitted for the rôle, for I'm stout and shall soon be quite bald. Then I would marry a virtuous woman if I could find one, and play the part of a model husband on the latest principles." He concluded with a vicious sneer that broadened to an ugly laugh.

He thought of all that should be in the future time when he sat in the Upper House, and out of the plenitude of his wisdom legislated for his troubled country; when the world courteously forgetting the shady side of his past life would of its own free will endow him with many virtues; when prudent matrons would offer him a selection of their daughters for his bride; when the church militant would speak of him with reverence as a man in whose power heaven had placed the disposal of fat livings; when, if he were ambitious, his gracious sovereign would sanction his holding some high office of state.

He laughed aloud at the pictures rising before his mental view, and, hearing him, one waiter assured another in a confidential whisper the colonel had taken too much wine. Unaware of the observation, he continued his meditations. "Wonder," said he, "if Kerry will leave his money in the funds to that brat Ulic—hang him. If he does it will make some difference to me. I shan't be able to squeeze much out of these Irish beggars now they have shown fight, but the Westmoreland tenants are all right, and he can't deprive me of the entailed estates. Kerry may go off any hour, the sooner the better say I, and some fine morning I shall awake to find myself a peer of the realm and a wealthy man."

So saying he flung away his cigar, and looked at his watch. It was eight o'clock. "Poor little woman," he



muttered, "I haven't seen her for five days. Waiter, call a cab."

In a few seconds he was driving towards Waterloo station, where he took a train just starting for Putney. Alighting here he walked through the village and up the hill, where lamps gleamed through the dining-room windows of genteel villas brave in the adornment of stucco porches and plaster pillars. The atmosphere of the railway carriage had been sultry, and the fresh breath of country air, heavy with the scent of lilac and laburnum, refreshed him. Evening light had faded, but the sky was clear and starful, and the soft grey gloaming could scarce be described as darkness. The change from glare and noise to shadow and peace unconsciously affected him.

"I fancy," he said, as he entered a pathway crossing Wimbledon Common in the direction of the house he sought, "I fancy life in the country would be enough to make a fellow sentimental—imagine a hardened old sinner like me in a tender mood," he sneered at himself, laughing at the picture he conjured. He had left the high road with its line of yellow lamps and sounds of human life well behind him, and had almost reached the centre of the common. Beyond, the pale grey deepened to obscurity, and loneliness brooded undisturbed. His thoughts still centred round himself. No compassion for the woman he had ruined; no remorse for the men he had wronged; no regret for the evil life he had led rested with him; his mind had no concern with the past, but was busy with the future. He wondered how he might free himself from Glender's wife when in a little while the novelty of her beauty had grown monotonous, and he had become weary of her. Would she return to Glender as Miriam had to Amerton; would she take her dismissal indifferently as others had; would she seek death like one he had



known? In this gathering darkness rose before him the face of a woman, almost a child in years, with features fixed and staring eyes, with stiffened fingers clutching river-bed weeds, and sunny hair smeared with slime.

The sight was ghastly; he strode forward quickly as if hurrying from its presence, and as he did, sounds of hasty footsteps treading the path behind him fell ominously on his ears. For a second he paused to assure himself he was not deceived, and a foreboding that was almost fear fell upon him. But this he would not admit even to himself, nor would he hasten his pace. The footsteps grew heavier as they approached nearer, until being quite close he turned suddenly round and paused. Even in the uncertain light he recognized at a glance the square-built, low-sized figure of Jacob Glender. The latter was not so certain of Colonel Tarbert's identity, but, to make sure, advanced and peered into his face, so closely that the colonel withdrew a step to avoid the fumes of whiskey coming strong and rank from Glender's warm breath.

"It's you, is it?" he said in a low, angry voice, panting from excitement and the rapidity of his walk.

"It's I," replied the colonel, in his coolest tones, buttoning his short gray jacket, fixing his hat firmly on his head, and watching the figure before him as if expecting an attack.

"I've waited and watched for you many a day and night," Glender said.

"Very good of you, I'm sure."

"Have done with that jargon; the time has past when I endured it. Answer me, where's my wife?"

"Don't you think it rather late to make that enquiry? You should have sought her when you were liberated from prison."

"Damn you," answered Glender, with an effort to



suppress his rage. "You know who I mean. Where's the woman you stole from me?"

"You pay too high a compliment to my superior fascinations."

"I'll have my answer, or——"

"Or return to spend the remainder of your days in a convict prison."

The words had scarce left his lips when Glender sprang upon him with the fury of a beast, gripping his throat in an iron grasp. Colonel Tarbert seized his arms, and with all his might strove to fling him to the earth. But rage lent force to his assailant, and with every sinew strained and muscle strengthened, with breath withheld and feet firmly planted, both struggled for some minutes in a fight each felt must be for life or death. At length the colonel slipped on the soft grass, and Glender, seeing his chance, with one effort in which his whole strength was concentrated, flung his antagonist on the ground. Delirious from victory, craving for revenge, wild from fury, mad with hate, he threw himself upon Tarbert, and fastening both hands round his throat, pressed his thumbs with might upon his windpipe. The prostrate man struggled with all his main, desperately kicking his feet in the air, striving with futile hands to unlock the deadly grasp fastened on him, and by fierce efforts of strength, lifting his body again and again from the earth, on which it fell with dull thuds. Glender never loosened his hold, never moved save to plant both knees upon his victim's breast, pinning him to the ground, swearing and threatening deliriously in a paroxysm of blind passion, heedless that the colonel's efforts to free himself grew less and less violent, and suddenly ceased. His rage had not exhausted itself before he felt a thick warm liquid trickling on his hands. Then he instantly released his grasp with a shudder, and getting on his



feet, fell back a pace from the dark, pulseless mass lying on the grass. But this form, though now free, moved neither limb nor muscle, nor uttered word nor sigh, nor gave sign of life, at which the hate and fury burning in Glender's heart died out swiftly, making room for nameless horror and grim fear. The sweat of his struggle froze, and the hot blood beating in his veins turned cold.

"Get up," he said in a low hoarse voice, "get up." But though he spoke, he felt a terrible conviction no words could ever again reach the man he addressed.

The seconds which passed seemed ages; he knew not how to act, but gazed round him, where all was darkness and stillness, and then upwards, where the stars were shining like so many flaming witnesses of his deed.

Despite the repugnance and dread he felt to approach that motionless figure, some inclination, powerless to conquer, prompted him to draw near and assure himself if life were extinct; if indeed he had added the crime of murder to the black record of his days. And he who but a few minutes before had been careless who heard the tone of his voice, the force of his struggle, now listened with a beating heart to every sound borne on the lonely night.

Far away on the high road wheels rattled over a stony track; further yet, the crack of a carter's whip rent the silence; a house dog barked at some passing tramp; and close by a little stream babbled on its way; otherwise all was still. Glender went down on his knees and fearfully crept towards the body, slowly as if expecting Tarbert to rise and avenge himself; tremulously because dreading the quiet form would never stir again.

Coming close beside it, he listened with suspended breath and strained nerves, with an anxiety that brought perspiration once more to his forehead, striving



with all his might, hoping with all his soul to hear some movement of life from this inert object; but it gave no sound, or made no motion. A terrible stillness seeming to emanate from this body, crept over the earth; and a great fear, confused, but dread, fell upon Glender. Loth to abandon all hope, he would fain have felt if this man's heart still beat, yet dared not touch that dark outline because of some nameless horror and grim repugnance possessing him. At length, overcoming these feelings, he stretched forward one hand, slowly and nervously, towards the colonel's breast, but withdrew it with a shudder; his fingers had lodged in a little pool of blood that trickling from the dead man's nostrils, down his chin and neck, had soaked through his shirt and lodged upon his breast. Glender, yet upon his knees, flung himself from the body and wiped his hand, smeared with clotted gore, again and again upon the grass, cursing his fate and uttering maledictions on the dead man lying there in darkness.

Suddenly he seemed to stand upon the brink of chaos, seeing no escape from its depths. Doom confronted him; justice tracked and pursued him as he fled through the world; the voice of blood crying for vengeance shrieked in his ears. Against the blackness of night rose the horrible picture of a gibbet painted in flame, from which a short, broad-shouldered figure, nerveless, lifeless, ghastly, dangled in mid-air.

Had it even come to this with him? Would such a fate close his miserable existence? Had heaven no pity, man no kindness for him because of the deeds he had done? He clenched his strong, square hands, and ground his teeth. Desperation banished fear, remorse, repugnance.

"Damn you," he cried, stretching one hand in the direction of the bleeding corpse; "you have trapped me into betraying my secret, made me your tool, stolen



my wife, but I have repaid you. Clever as you are, you have lost the game. I have but taken the justice the world would refuse me. Why shouldn't I live? Dead men tell no tales; here is no witness of my deed."

He sprang to his feet, filled with sudden hope and firm resolution; but though he would have moved away, he felt powerless to stir from the spot until he had obeyed an impulse too strong for resistance. He listened again; only for the stream murmuring in its course to the sea all was still. Then he knelt down near the corpse once more.

"I must see him," he said. "We shall never meet again, unless in hell, and I'll have a last look at him."

But though he strained his sight, he could not discern the colonel's features; a damp mist had slowly risen from earth, and as a great pall covered all things; stars were blotted from the sky. Disappointed, Glender mechanically put his hands in his pockets, and produced a box of matches. Fearing the attention a light might cause, and the danger it might prove to him, he hesitated a moment before striking a match; but the fascination produced by the thought of seeing the dead man face to face overcame all caution. Having searched around and found his hat, which had fallen in the fatal struggle, he struck a match within it, and so shaded, held it above the lifeless form: then, not without hesitation, looked in its face.

The feeble glare reflected itself in the grey, glazed pupils of the protruding eyes, staring wildly, horribly, fixedly into the pitiless skies. The murderer could not remove his own from them, but with suspended breath gazed at his victim until the light, burning down, dropped into the little pool of blood on the dead man's chest, and with a splutter was extinguished.

Only then was Glender able to avert his head.



"Some devil has prompted me to this madness," he muttered, "that the sight might haunt me to the last moment of my life."

He rose hurriedly, and rushed swiftly through the night as if pursued by the terrible vision of those glaring eyes.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### A TERRIBLE CHARGE.

THE current of Philip Amerton's life had, since his reconciliation with his wife, flowed on in placid contentment, if not in happiness. The past lay behind him, fateful, dark, and sorrowful, from which he resolutely turned towards the future, determined to fulfil his duty by the woman whose existence he had voluntarily bound with his own.

Too manly to seek petty revenge, too generous to inflict pain, no word of his had ever reminded her of his great wrong and her past error. But with her the memory of that fatal step dwelt continually. Her old brightness and vivacity had vanished, leaving her mental life in shadow and gloom. Sensitive to the censure of a world which blamed her, not that she had strayed from the perfect path, but rather that her departure had been taken in the light of day, she shrank from contact with society.

Those who in the past had called themselves her dearest friends, knowing from private experience the enormity of sin, were shocked she had yielded to its ways. Had she continued the life to which temptation had allured her, society would have rested satisfied, slept as soundly, fluttered as gaudily, prayed as



devoutly as before; but that she should strive to retrace her one unhappy step, to range herself amongst the immaculate wives of her acquaintance, was a grievance it could not endure with equanimity. The Jews of old, conscious of their guilt, forbore casting the first stone upon a fallen woman, but our modern Pharisees, more brazen in hypocrisy than their predecessors, know no mercy; for in denouncing vice, they strive to cover themselves with virtue.

Some there were, pure in thought, compassionate in deed, who sought this sorrow-stricken and repentant woman, and taking her to their hearts welcomed her back to the better life from which she had momentarily strayed. Foremost amongst these was Gal Alex, who, by gentle sympathy and kindly words, brought balm to the lonely woman in this period of her life.

Comfort was indeed little known to Philip Amerton's wife, and could those who reviled her have heard the self-reproaches she uttered, seen the tears she shed, they would possibly have spared her many bitter censures. Through the lonely hours of day and silent watches of night remorse visited her as a phantom from which she had neither power nor desire to escape. Had her husband taunted her with her shame, reproached her with his misery, she could have better borne his words than the thoughtful gentleness with which he treated her. A hundred times she would have flung herself at his feet and with tears of repentance and words of grief have relieved her feelings, but that he, in what he deemed mercy, had forbidden all reference to the past, and she feared to recall the sorrow he would fain forget.

And through her grief a new soul seemed born in her, which changed her life without and within; for with the advent of serious thoughts and regretful feelings came a light in her eyes which they before had



lacked. She had tasted forbidden fruit, learned the bitter knowledge of good and evil, and the world could be the same to her nevermore. And because of all she had endured in awakening to her shame, the buoyant health she once enjoyed departed from her. Gradually the colour faded from her cheeks, strength deserted her, and a condition of nervousness, which gradually sapped vitality, seized possession of her. At Philip's request she had consulted a physician who prescribed rest and change; but the latter she was unwilling to seek, and the former was impossible for her to obtain.

Meanwhile Amerton took up his work long set aside, and by this means sought and found absorption from remembrances. The subtle link of sympathy missing during the first months of his married life had been forged in the potent fire of suffering and now united his wife to him. By degrees they had come to look hopefully forward to a future when, their recent wound being healed by time, they might begin existence anew in another land. Their interests and happiness were now identical; time might bring them forgetfulness and peace.

On the morning succeeding Colonel Tarbert's murder they were seated at breakfast. Through the open windows came a sight of newly budded trees and sounds of birds' songs heralding summer time.

"You are better to day?" said Philip, interrogatively.

"I am," she replied, anxious to satisfy him, though not quite certain she spoke truthfully.

"When I returned from my walk you were asleep, and I didn't wake you to say good-night."

"I wish you had," she said.

"Why?" he asked.

"You would have driven some troubled dreams to flight."



"I thought you slept tranquilly and, knowing how valuable rest is to you, I stole from your room again."

"What time did you return?"

"A little while after midnight. The air was cool and I walked towards St. Paul's that I might see the great dome looming against star light. When the sky is clear the effect is fine, as you will see when you grow well. Then tempted by the profound quietness of the city, I wandered up and down its streets, a few hours before a scene of noise and confusion, but now silent almost as a grave-yard."

"I have never seen the city by night."

"Few Londoners have. To me it is one of the most interesting sights of which we can boast. You remember what Lord Macaulay says about the New Zealander sitting on a broken arch of London Bridge sketching the ruins of St. Paul's. Well, I wondered last night if changeful fate would ever lay London desolate."

"Some inhabitant of Babylon may have made the same surmises concerning his city ages before its destruction. All things are possible."

"But I hope no man will know such a possibility until chaos has come again."

At this moment they were interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who, addressing her master, said a gentleman wished to see him on business.

"Did he give you his name?" Philip enquired.

"No sir. He first asked if you were at home, and then said he wanted to see you."

"Probably a printer coming to talk about proofs," he said to his wife, then added to the servant, "Show him into the study and say I shall be with him in a moment."

The study was separated from the breakfast room by folding doors and a heavy curtain, which hung across the portal. As Amerton stepped into the room, he left



the door ajar, but drew the *portière* behind him. He was astonished to see Inspector Collins, whom he advanced to meet; the gravity of the man's manner and repressed expression of his face chilled Amerton immediately.

"I have called on very serious business, sir," said the officer, ignoring Philip's invitation to be seated.

"Serious business—with me?"

"Yes, and no one wishes more honestly you may come out of it safely, but I must do my duty, no matter how painful, and I now arrest you on the charge of murder."

"Murder?" repeated Philip, scarce comprehending the full sense of the word, and feeling sick at its mention. Some terrible mistake had been made.

"Yes, sir, for the murder of Colonel Tarbert."

"Good God, what is this you say?"

"A man was found strangled on Wimbledon Common early this morning; his watch, rings, purse and papers were found on the body; the latter led to the discovery of his identity."

Philip felt stunned; horror fell upon him; after a moment's silence he said, "Why should this concern me?"

"As the injury he did you is well-known, suspicion falls upon you, sir." The Inspector had not concluded his sentence when a dull thud, as of a fallen body, was heard from the next room. Philip rushed towards the curtain and, drawing it back, saw his wife lying insensible on the floor. In a second he was beside her, and at first so white was her face, so motionless her limbs, he believed the words she overheard had killed her. Raising her gently he carried her to a sofa, calling on the Inspector to ring for her maid. In his suspense and fright he forgot the terrible blow just fallen on himself.



Minutes that seemed hours to him passed before he saw the blood creep slowly back to her face, noted the breath come feebly from her lips. And when at last her eyes opened they met his with a dazed look that slowly dawned to recognition; then catching sight of the Inspector, she shuddered and closed her lids again. The officer withdrew to the study, becoming aware of which, Miriam bade her maid leave likewise. Then bursting into tears she sobbed and cried in a wild hysterical outburst of grief. Philip put his arms around her, but did not strive to interrupt this outcome of feeling until it had almost subsided.

"You have overheard the Inspector's words?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, and oh, Philip," she whispered tremulously, "you are innocent of this charge."

"God knows I am," he replied.

"I don't doubt it, dear; but how can you look at me, speak to me, touch me, I who have brought such misery on your life. Would to God I had died the most terrible of deaths before we met."

Still with his arms around her, without anger in his heart, without reproach in his eyes, he answered, "All men have their crosses to bear."

"Ever gentle and kind," she cried out; "but I know this blow is but the bitter punishment of my sin. I should welcome it were it ten times as heavy, if my sufferings could save you. But that you whose life I have crossed and ruined should be pursued with disgrace is more than I can bear. Why do you not curse and leave me for ever; why do you not hate and kill me; ah, if I only had the courage I would rid you and myself of the miserable burden of my life."

And again she cried as if her heart would break, shrinking from his touch, and burying her face in the pillows of the sofa. He knew not what to say that



might calm her, but sat there beside her waiting until the crisis of this grief had passed.

"Listen, Miriam," he said at length. "This charge against me being false, cannot continue. My innocence must soon be proved to the satisfaction of the world. I did not even will the death of this man who wronged us both most grievously; no doubt he who killed him will soon be discovered."

"Ah," she replied, "you talk lightly of the charge to pacify me. And it seems bitter and cruel that now, when I would gladly die to save you from pain and misery or prove my love and gratitude, this fresh shame should fall upon you through me. Oh, my love, my love," she cried out, "how have I wronged you, how have I made you suffer! Will neither the grief nor remorse that eat my heart day and night help to make atonement for my past?"

He could make no response, though he felt his heart wrenched by her sorrow. Inspector Collins in the next room, noting the silence and endeavouring to profit by it, coughed loudly and advanced to the door.

"One moment," said Philip, and the Inspector again withdrew.

"You are going," Miriam said wildly, sitting up and clutching her husband's arm with both hands, "You are going but not to—surely not to——"

"No," he answered, "not to prison. Don't excite yourself, dear. I appear before the magistrate, bail is given for my reappearance when required, and I shall return here again."

"When, this evening—to-night, don't deceive me, Philip; it would be false kindness."

"I shall probably be back in a couple of hours."

A new thought flashing through her mind, she started suddenly to her feet.

"May I go with you?" she asked.



"No, no, you must stay here and strive to agitate yourself as little as possible. Before leaving the house I shall send a telegram to Gal Alex asking her to come and stay with you whilst I'm away. I won't even say good-bye," he added hurriedly, "only *au revoir*," and bending down he kissed her, and with a heavy heart left the room.

Accompanied by Inspector Collins he entered a cab and drove towards the Hammersmith police court. As they proceeded the officer said :

"I must give you the usual caution, sir, not to say anything that may incriminate yourself."

"Thank you," answered Philip, "so long as I speak the truth I cannot do that."

"If you can prove an alibi by stating where you spent the last twenty-four hours, the charge so far as you are concerned is at an end."

"That will be impossible for me. I passed the early part of last night walking about the city alone; when I returned home it was late, the servants were in bed and my wife asleep."

"Then, sir, I had better warn you, I think your position is uncommonly dangerous."

"How can it be when I am innocent?"

"Consider the circumstances and you will see. Colonel Tarbert wronged you; you sought our aid in tracing him, and left England for months to follow him——"

"Not for the purpose of revenging myself, but of rescuing my wife."

"That may be: the fact remains you followed, but did not find him. You returned to England, so did he. You spent the early part of a certain night out of your home and alone, next morning Colonel Tarbert is found murdered."

"You put the case plainly, and I see circumstantial



evidence seems against me," replied Philip, a sense of danger dawning on him for the first time.

"It does, sir," replied the Inspector.

"And I am innocent," said Amerton.

After this conversation both remained silent, each absorbed by his own thoughts. "Surely," said Philip to himself, "Benoni, who can penetrate the surface of men's minds and read the secrets of women's hearts, can discover the murderer and set me before the world guiltless." But the consideration of the mystic's disappearance on an occasion when he looked to him for help, rose before him and weighted him with doubt. And he knew not whether to hope or fear.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### BENONI'S HELP.

PHILIP, after a considerable delay in the police court at Hammersmith, was liberated on bail. As he drove homewards he could hear the vendors of early afternoon papers crying in shrill voices: "Dreadful murder on Wimbledon Common: arrest of a well-known author." He listened without change of feeling to the announcements, for it seemed to him he had no concern with the charge, that he was not the man at whom circumstantial evidence pointed as the perpetrator of this crime.

But if, he thought, the law claimed his life in atonement for the murder, then would he, without protest or sorrow, lay down the burden of his existence. Joy or grief, hope or despair, would have no power henceforth to touch him; he believed indifference to all things had seared his senses; that he could be the sport of his own emotions no longer. No resentment



at the fate which brought this disgrace upon him rose in his mind; no anger that the story of his domestic life would become an oft-told tale to excite interest or elicit pity, remained with him. He was dead to all feelings, and could suffer no more.

On arriving at his home he found his wife with Gal Alex. She had started from her place on the sofa on hearing the roll of his cab wheels, and awaited him at the door of the dining-room, her face flushed, her limbs trembling from nervous excitement. She flung her arms around him, and he led her into the room.

"You have come back, dear," she said, "but oh, how long you have been away. I counted the hours and minutes of your absence. They knew you were innocent of that terrible deed, and have set you free. Tell me all, Philip," she said impatiently.

"I have been examined before the magistrate, and then liberated on bail. Come and sit down here; you have over-excited yourself."

"How could I be calm at such a crisis? Tell me, have they found him, the man who—who——"

"The murderer? Not yet," he replied.

"But you will not have to go before the magistrate again?"

"I shall, unless the man who is guilty is discovered."

"Have they no clue to him?" asked Gal Alex anxiously.

"None of which I am aware."

"But they may have for all that," she replied.

"You are ever hopeful," said Miriam, turning towards her.

"It is always the darkest hour which is nearest to dawn," Gal Alex said, looking at Philip. "This is but a passing cloud in your life."

"If I thought it was not," Miriam replied, "I



should go mad!" and she rose from her chair, her hands burning, her pulse beating, her eyes flashing with excitement.

"You will make yourself seriously ill," said Philip. "Remember the better you bear up, the more you will be able to help me."

"I help you, I, who have brought you nothing but misery and shame," she answered in bitter self-reproach; "and yet," she added in a gentler voice, "I would give my life to save you from pain. Ah, Philip, if I could only make you believe this—but how can I hope to do so when I think of the past?" and her voice became choked by sobs.

"I know you would, dear; but if you agitate yourself like this you will have brain fever."

"And add fresh care to that which already weighs you down. See," she continued, making an effort to subdue her feelings, "I am quiet now; I will be calm for your sake."

"And now I have much to do," he said. "Before I have an interview with my solicitors I must see Benoni; he may be able to gain a clue which will put justice on the murderer's track."

Gal Alex looked at him again, and it flashed upon Philip there was a message in her glance, but he could not interpret its meaning, and she remained silent.

"Then seek him immediately," Miriam said impatiently. "Let him now give proof of the power he possesses, and save you from further trouble. Go at once."

At that instant a loud ring was heard at the street door, and for some seconds no one in the room moved or spoke. Then Miriam impatiently crossed to the window and looked out.

"It is he," she cried, a mingled feeling of hope and fear thrilling her. "It is Benoni."



Philip went into the hall and met the mystic, who bowing, with arms crossed upon his breast, said:

"Peace be with you."

"I am glad to see you," answered Philip; "will you come into the dining-room, where my wife and Gal Alex are, or——"

"I should prefer to speak with you alone."

"Then let us go to my study, where we shall not be interrupted."

"It is best," replied Benoni.

When they were seated in this room, Philip said, "You know, I suppose, all that has befallen me."

"I am aware he who wronged you has paid part of the penalty of his crimes, and that you who are innocent have been accused of taking his life," Benoni answered.

"I have just come from the police court. At present the blow of this accusation has deadened my senses, and I am almost indifferent to my fate; but by-and-by, when I wake to the situation, my horror will be terrible."

Benoni regarded him with compassion. "Your trial is heavy, indeed," he said.

"But you can rid me immediately of all suspicion by revealing the murderer's name."

"Of that I am as ignorant as you are."

"Then," replied Philip despairingly, "I am lost."

"Always impatient," replied the mystic. "Did I come in contact with the man by accident or design, then should I know he had committed the deed, and describe its occurrence as reflected in the astral light surrounding him; but I know not where to seek him."

"Surely you are aware of some other means of discovering him?"

"Hear me, my friend. I have consulted the winged



messengers of air, who for ever attend me, but because of their pure spiritual essence they have been unable to penetrate the black cloud of malignant hate and furious passion surrounding the murdered man. When time has helped to dissipate this, they can find the assassin's name and resting place."

"Then it may be too late. Every hour deepens the impression of my supposed guilt. Is there no hope?"

"There is. I can gain the knowledge you desire."

"How?" asked Philip anxiously.

"From the mouth of the dead man's ghost."

Amerton started; an uncanny feeling gradually crept over him.

"This seems horrible," he said.

"It is necessary," replied Benoni calmly.

"But is it not sorcery?" Philip asked, shrinking from contaminating himself with necromancy, whilst fascinated by the idea Benoni's words had conjured before his vivid imagination.

"No, not sorcery, or I should not practise it; but the science of employing spiritual powers to produce visible effects, which the world terms magic."

"Forgive me," said Philip, "that I allowed even a passing doubt of you to cross my mind; but so much has happened to distract me within the past few hours I know not what to say."

"The world denies my power, regards me as a conjurer, reviles me as an impostor," answered Benoni sadly, "but I would have you think well of me."

"I have wronged you, pray forgive me."

"No wrong can injure me, and I have nothing to forgive. I have great desire to serve you, for which reason I shall direct the powers I possess to save you from further pain."

"To say I thank you seems so poor a phrase by



which to express my feelings, and yet I know no better."

The mystic bowed, and after a brief silence said, "The process by which I shall summon this dead man's shade is one requiring not only the highest powers of a magician, but the greatest courage of a man. It is fraught with difficulty, it is not without danger, it is a force which should never be exercised save in such an imminent case of peril as the present?"

"How can this be done?" Amerton asked wonderingly.

"Simply by the efficacy a mystic possesses; the great principles of which are faith and will, the potent means of which are symbols and invocations. Now listen to me well."

"With all my heart," Philip made reply.

"Each man has two distinct bodies, an earthly and a spiritual, closely united, and governed by a soul. The outer body is visible and tangible, the inner invisible and intangible; both are so intimately connected that an injury or pleasure given to one is immediately experienced by the other. If the exterior body suffers from sickness or accidents, its inner or ethereal counterpart ails likewise, and is no longer in bright and buoyant health. If the inner body endures fear, remorse, suspense, or absence from those loved, these ailments, though leaving no mark upon the outer form, cause it to waste and weaken, because of the interior disease. The inner body is the envelope of man's soul, largely partaking of its spiritual nature; it is usually spoken of as the astral form. It is this astral body which the witches and necromancers of old, summoning to their presence, injured to death by wicked spells, or subjected to obedience by strange enchantments, knowing its earthly counterpart must



suffer from its maladies and reflect its inclinations. You follow me."

"Clearly."

"The perceptive senses of the interior man exceed those of the exterior body. When the grossness of the latter does not interfere, the inner self perceives danger, foresees future events of which it strives to warn its counterpart, recognizes at a glance its enemies even when wearing the semblance of friends, and knowing its friends amongst companies of strangers. This shadow man is capable of being made manifest to others at distances from its earthly body during its life and after its demise. Mystics know the secret of projecting it when and where they please, making it visible to natural sight, enabling it to converse. At death these two bodies are rent asunder, the earthly form returns to dust, from which it sprung. The astral form, deprived of the soul it encased, and by which alone it existed, slowly evaporates. The decay is gradual, but finally complete. Before the astral corpse dissolves, and whilst retaining its senses, it clings to its earthly partner, or hovers near the spot where, in case of murder or accident, it was violently dissevered from its outer body. It likewise haunts houses it once inhabited, visits friends it loved, or enemies it detested, seeks the scenes of former enjoyments, and under certain circumstances, or in obedience to conjurations becomes visible to and speaks with the living. It is a mere soulless ghastly shade endowed with sense, frequently seeking passionate pleasures it is no longer capable of enjoying through the human body, and invariably shrinking from an extinction it dreads. In a case where it has been prematurely severed from its shell by murder, it will rejoice at opportunities to gratify its desire for vengeance by revealing its assassin's name if that be unknown, or of driving him on to



suicide or to madness. To-night, before the first hour of day, shall I, while yet its senses are vigorous, summon the astral corpse of him of whose death you are accused, and bid it reveal its murderer's name."

Benoni paused. Philip had listened to him with breathless interest, and now asked, "May I be present when you summon this shade?"

"If your faith be firm, your will strong, your courage unflinching, then come with me and behold the exercise of a power few possess; but if you lack one of these qualities, better remain where you are."

"I shall go with you," he replied determinedly.

"I leave you now," said the mystic, "to prepare for my work. Fast from sunset, and pray to Him who rules the powers of air and the souls of men that I may have strength to perform this deed."

"Where will the conjuration take place?"

"On the spot where the murder was committed. If the shade be not already there, I shall summon it with ease to where the dead man's blood soaks the earth. When darkness comes I will call for you here. Be ready to accompany me. May peace reign in your heart. Amen."

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### FROM THE MOUTH OF THE DEAD.

THIS weary day wore slowly away, and evening closed in sadly. Totally exhausted by the shock received, and excited by the suspense endured, Miriam had been obliged to retire early. Silence fell upon the house; without and within reigned depression and gloom. Philip had deferred consultation with his solicitors until the result became known of the terrible ordeal



Benoni proposed. During the long hours of the afternoon and early evening he remained alone in the study, thinking over the strange position in which fate had placed him, wondering how this chapter in his life's history would end. Impatient of delay, the time which must elapse before Benoni arrived seemed intolerably long. He could not read because of the ideas which came between him and the page; he could not rest, yet shrank from venturing abroad now his name had become a by-word in the world's mouth.

It was quite dark when he entered his wife's bedroom. A shaded lamp burned low on a distant table, casting weird, distorted shadows on the walls and ceiling. Believing Miriam slept, he was about to withdraw lest he might disturb her, when she called him.

"Have I waked you?" he asked, approaching and bending over her.

"No, dear."

The haggard face, white as the pillow on which it lay, and large frightened eyes unnaturally bright, alarmed him.

"I fear," he said, "you have not been asleep."

"No; but it's well I haven't."

"Why?" he asked, seating himself beside her.

"Because, latterly, my dreams are terrible, and lying awake I have time to think quietly," she replied gently.

"But you mustn't worry yourself in this way, it can only harm you."

"On the contrary my thoughts have wrought me much good."

He did not answer; the silence of the semi-darkened chamber with its weird shadows awed both. At last she said in a low voice:

"I should like, dear, to tell you something. Can you stay with me a little while?"



"Certainly," he replied, "I should have come to you before had I not believed you slept."

"I wish," she said softly, "I could tell you how much I have changed."

"I know you have," he answered, anxious to save her pain which references to the past might bring.

"I don't mean I have merely repented my great wrong to you, which no act of mine can right again, but I feel, nay, I know I have altered inwardly in a way I can scarce express. It seems that from my grief a new soul is born within me, and all things are different from what they were before. When alone with my thoughts the pettiness of my former life, its shallow excitements and feverish pleasures come home to me; my sin grows darker, and you more noble."

"Did we not agree to let the dead past bury its dead?"

"Aye, but my past will not rest in its grave; its ghost rises before me, sits with me through troubled days, lies beside me through wakeful nights."

He wondered to hear her speak in this strain, and pondered on her words; and again they were silent awhile. Presently, as if continuing a train of thought, she said:

"Ah, Philip, I never loved you until now. The feeling I bore for you in the first months of our married life cannot be compared with my present affection; for at last I begin to understand you, and I fancy if life were left me I might in some poor way atone for the past."

"How can you speak in this manner? Why, of course, you will live," he said chidingly, "and when this wretched time has passed we shall go hence, and in a new world begin a brighter life."

She smiled at the prospect, but gradually her pale face grew grave.



"God grant it," she said, "but——" and her voice trembled and was still.

"What is it?" he said, bending over her.

"Lying awake at nights I sometimes fancy death lurks amongst the shadows there, waiting for me, ready to take me from you, now that I know and value your love. But surely, oh surely," she cried, her voice rising and her eyes brightening with hysterical excitement, "this punishment will be spared me. I have wept till my heart grew sick, and prayed till my voice became faint, for forgiveness, and death must not, shall not part us." Saying which, she suddenly flung her arms round her husband as if she would defy the king of terrors himself.

Philip strove to soothe her.

"My darling," he replied, "your nerves have been playing you strange tricks because you are weak and sad. Presently, when you have grown strong, we shall laugh at your childish fears, which with all our past sorrows and cares we will leave behind us for ever."

Even as he spoke she smiled, and unwinding her arms from his neck lay back upon her pillows. Then he pictured to her the land of their future home. It should certainly be in the vigorous new world; Canada, perhaps, or California with its vast tracks of country, or Florida with its eternal summer, or one of the great cities of the States; till by degrees she seemed to forget her present fears in the contemplation of future joys; and gradually her lids closed drowsily. Then he said she must have a long sound sleep, that she might be able to remain up all day to-morrow; he winced at thought of what might happen before dawn. And summoning her maid, he left Miriam, who followed him to the door with her eyes, praying God would bless him and pardon her.



He entered the study heavy-hearted and weary, to find Benoni awaiting him.

"Peace be on you," said the mystic.

"Has the hour come?" Philip asked anxiously.

"It is at hand," replied Benoni, and then asked gravely, "Are you certain of your courage? If not, let me depart alone, and I will wrestle with this shade in solitude; but, if you are brave come with me, and such sights shall be revealed to you as few men have seen."

"Come what will I shall accompany you."

"My friend," said the mystic reprovingly, "you must not venture on this undertaking in a spirit of recklessness, but rather with calmness begotten of determination. Should fear overtake and master you, danger, mental and physical, might befall you, which I may be unable to prevent; but should courage sustain you, then will you have gained a step in the pathway you desire to tread."

"I am resolved to go with you," Amerton answered.

"Then in the name of the All-Merciful, follow me."

Philip felt as if he had received the summons of some ghastly visitant, whose invitation he was powerless to decline, even had he desired to remain; and in another moment they had left the house and were walking in silence through the night. The journey was to be made on foot. Philip felt as one moving in a troubled dream. A vague depressing feeling, which was neither fear of mind or body, nor sadness of thought or soul, took possession of him. He walked in mental darkness, not knowing whither his steps might lead; neither despairing nor hoping, but burdened by a weight impossible to escape. They were soon beyond the outskirts of the town. Benoni was silent, and Philip had no desire by the utterance of a



word to break the spell which had fallen on him. And as they pressed onward it seemed to him he was not merely alone with the mystic, but that others whom indeed he could neither distinctly hear nor see, went with him on his way; a dark and pulseless throng surging forward to a common destination. At times indeed, soft sounds, as of footsteps treading on dust, fell on his ear; and anon the feeling of light and almost intangible substances brushing past him made him pause; but only night surrounded him.

Heedless of time, scarce conscious of motion, he followed the tall figure of Benoni until they arrived within sight of Wimbledon Common, which seemed denser and more dreary for the feeble chain of yellow lamps bounding its circumference. A faint wind soughed across the dark space, as though nature sobbed aloud. In the midnight sky a waning moon had risen, whose faint aerial light touched the summits of the distant Surrey hills, leaving their bases drowned in shadows. And as Philip entered the common, the conviction that he was but one in a ghastly speechless train became stronger yet. He felt prompted to stretch forward his hands in darkness, but withheld his inclination, lest his touch might encounter—he knew not what; he would have spoken, but words died unuttered on his lips.

Onwards they went, crossing dark patches of heather, past dismal ponds where frogs croaked ominously, over the little brook that had heard the last words Colonel Tarbert spoke, and had witnessed the struggle between the murderer and the murdered. Beyond its murmur no other sound disturbed the solemn silence of approaching midnight. Around lay vast space; beneath, the darksome earth; above, the watchful heavens. The scene and hour well befitted the task of calling a dead man back to life. Having arrived at the spot where



Colonel Tarbert had been strangled, Benoni paused and waited for Amerton to join him. The moonlight was sufficient to show them the torn trampled and blood-soaked ground where the struggle had taken place. The mystic looked at his companion. "You must cast fear from your heart," he said, "but with courage no evil can befall you. It is not yet too late to withdraw. Do you go, or stay?"

"I stay," Philip answered firmly.

"Now do I begin my work; it will soon be midnight, and by the first hour of day we must have done."

Laying outside his outer robe, he appeared habited in the white linen garment he had worn when Amuni revealed himself to Philip. Then producing a short wand, of curious workmanship, he described a circle sixty-three feet in circumference, around which he walked thrice, repeating incantations the while.

"Within this space," he said, "it is impossible for any living creature save you and I to come; see that you pass not without it; beyond its bounds, nought can be seen by mortal sight of what may happen inside."

From this ring he measured seven feet, and then made an inner circle, uttering low gruesome chants as he worked.

"Pass not beyond this," he said, "but stand between the two."

Taking some laurel and sandal wood he had carried with him, he speedily built a pyre in the centre on the spot soaked with blood, and having made many mystic signs above it, and walked around it three times seven, lighted and watched it kindle into flames. Then with some of the burning wood he described around the fire a third circle, taking heed he stepped not within its circumference. A thin column of smoke slowly rose and blended with night; the fire kindled, fanned



by winds rushing from the four corners of the desolate common, a column of red light consuming darkness.

Around the inner circle Benoni walked, with outstretched arms, and voice raised in fervent supplication. Then pausing to take from his breast a lock of the murdered man's hair, he, uttering conjurations in weird and plaintive tones, cast it on the pyre. At first it seemed the flames died suddenly out leaving darkness triumphant, but soon they rose with increased strength and burned with lurid hues. Thereon, apparently from beneath the earth, at first subdued, but momentarily increasing in volume, was heard a confusion of sounds as of wailing infants strangled at birth, and piteous cries of suicides, and despairing shouts of brave men drowning in their strength, and hoarse murmurs of human agony, and piercing screams of maniacs. And from within the circle billows of smoke and flame ascended, in the midst of which half-formed and deformed figures, more monsters than men, flittingly appeared and vanished, issuing from fire and blending with smoke, loading the air with imprecations vile.

Benoni stood unmoved and with reverent mien, his white-robed figure defined against the crimson light. In a voice ringing above the terrible confusion of noises he cried out, "By the measureless atmosphere and all that move therein, by the boundless and fathomless seas and all that dwell therein, by the earth and all that live upon its surface and beneath its crust, by the fire and such beings as exist within its flames, by the light of day and the silence of night, by the sacred rites of Hecate, I conjure and exorcise thee, thou distressed shade, as thou hopest for rest from pain, for ease from misery, to present thyself here and reveal unto me the name of thy murderer, and answer such questions as I demand."



He ceased. The winds were quieted, the earth was still, an oppressive silence as if nature listened and were awed, filled all space. Then the mystic spoke again in solemn tones:

"Shade of him murdered on this spot, bodiless phantom dwelling in air, astral semblance of the dead, I conjure and exorcise thee by the power within me thou darest not defy, to rise immediately before me and answer my demands. Great will be thy punishment if thou dost not obey, for with a sign of my right hand shall I compel thee to endure agonies unknown to thee."

Scarce had his words ended when a mighty change came over the face of night. Earth shook on its axis convulsed by fear, the waning moon suddenly sank into chaos, torn clouds fled wildly through the ominous sky, furious winds shrieked like the cries of lost souls hurled to fathomless depths, lightning-lit rain descended from heaven, rustling in its fall as if with the black wings of outcast angels. Within the inner circle the darkening atmosphere grew thick with hell's most foul and wanton tribe: the blood-streaked, leprous and distraught embodiment of nameless deeds, before which light shrank aghast, above which darkness gloated ravenously. Troops of scarce-shaped creatures of hideous feature and evil portent—slimily creeping in abject blindness, whirling circle-wise in tortured madness—darted and peered blear-eyed and menacing through smoke, to hide their loathsomeness anon neath flame. Affrighted night became clamorous with sounds of imprecations hissed serpent-like from venomous tongues, with yells of wild despair, and laughter of madmen's gladness, and words of blasphemous intent shrieked from blistering throats.

But as Benoni prayed with outstretched hands, this hellish outburst gradually subsided. Then the column



of smoke rising from the blood-soaked ground slowly solidified, until it assumed a semblance of the form and figure of the murdered man. There stood the phantom, a ghastly, soulless, inhuman thing, with dull protruding eyes, swollen features and twitching lips, the counterpart of its earthly body, a sight to make men mad from fear, a visitant to blast the fruitful earth with barrenness. As yet it seemed unconscious of its own existence or surroundings, but remained motionless and dazed, as if awaked from deep sleep, or summoned from abysmal depths. Phosphorescent light wrapped it as with a mantle; the atmosphere glowed with consuming heat. And once more was heard the mystic's voice uttering a chant that rose and fell with even cadence, by virtue of which a change came over the astral corpse. For suddenly its chest heaved as with the breath of life, its limbs moved, and reason dawning in its terrible eyes, they fastened themselves eagerly upon the figure of the mystic.

"Why," it demanded in a low tone, the very mockery of a human voice, "why have you summoned me here?"

"That I may gain from you knowledge I am otherwise powerless to obtain; that you may right one who in life you much wronged. Some hours ago your human counterpart was murdered on this spot."

At these words its face quickly changed. "Hours ago," it interrupted, "weeks, months, it may be years ago, I was strangled by a cowardly villain. Were it in my power I would tear his heart from his body whilst he lived, and dead, I would bury him fathoms deep in hell. I haunt him night and day, his dreams are madness, his waking delirium; help me to have vengeance is all I ask."

Its eyes burned with the red agony of hate, its lips



trembled from fury, it scattered blood from its writhing hands.

"Nay," said Benoni gently, "leave vengeance to a higher power; this passion but increases your torture, and will quicken your extinction."

"Give me revenge and leave me to my fate," it replied shortly.

"No knowledge of him who murdered you has been yet obtained, but an innocent man is charged with the deed."

"Who is he?" asked the phantom.

"A man whom you grievously injured—Philip Amerton."

At mention of the name the terrible shade jabbered hideously as if it would have laughed.

"I hate him. I hate him," it said.

"Why?" questioned Benoni.

"You know well; because I have done him wrong."

"This is a reason you should now right him," replied the mystic.

"We hate best those who serve us and those we injure. He has been twice my rival. His wife left me and returned to him before I had grown weary of her."

"Remember you have for ever done with earthly passions."

"My desires are strong as when I lived."

"Then you would have an innocent man suffer death for your murder."

"I would have Amerton hanged," it said, and again came the pitiless jabbering sounds from fleshless lips.

"And have him who took your life enjoy that of which he deprived you?"

"No, curse the villain. I would have him taste the torments I have known."

"Then tell me his name, I command you."



"You will see me avenged," cried out the ghastly shade.

"His name—waste no more time."

"It is——" it said, but its voice faltered and its sentence ended abruptly. Benoni looked upwards, and from some faint change in the sky saw the allotted time for the interview between the living and the dead had almost ended. Then directing his glance to the astral corpse, he saw with fearful eyes its consciousness had begun to fade.

"Speak," he said; "a moment more and it may be too late. Who is your murderer?"

The lips of the phantom moved, but emitted no sound. Benoni extended his arms, and with all his will and strength pronounced a conjuration and command, then added, "His name, the name of him who strangled you. I bid you speak."

A great struggle passed over the face of the shade, a wild look as if it were fearful of losing revenge gleamed in its horrible eyes, with one strong endeavour consciousness was recovered, and it gasped out the name, "Jacob Glender."

"This is the truth you speak?" asked Benoni.

"Assuredly. It is the name by which he was known to men; formerly he was called the Rev. Amos Berkeley."

"Where is he to be found?"

"Even now is he close at hand. I lure him to this spot that his torture may be the greater; he cannot escape me."

"Why did he murder you?"

"Because I had taken from him the woman he called his wife. Set the hounds of justice on his track. I shall help them to run him down. Is there more you would say to me; if so, speak at once, or I shall fade from your sight and lose all power of speech."



"No more. What you have said suffices for my purpose. Withdraw in peace and depart unto your proper place without injury to any man; and peace be continued between you and me. Silence and farewell."

In the stillness following this speech came a wailing sound, "Farewell." A whirlwind of desperate voices rose in the air, then suddenly ceased, leaving night affrighted by their shriek. The shade of the murdered man faded to a column of grey smoke rising from the pyre; the low red light of the firewood died suddenly out. Then did Benoni destroy all traces of the circles he had made. And as he and Amerton left the common, across which frightened winds swept sobbing in their flight, the first hour of a new day rang out from the belfry of a distant church.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### HOLDING COUNSEL.

ON the second evening following the night of Colonel Tarbert's murder, Ulic called by appointment on Gal Alex. She was alone in the drawing-room, seated in a deep arm-chair, well removed from the faint light of crimson-shaded lamps. Apparently she awaited him. When he entered she rose to greet him, and Ulic saw her face was paler than its wont, and became conscious of a suppressed nervousness in her voice and manner. This gradually imparting itself to him, he became ill-at-ease.

"Have you seen Mrs. Amerton to-day?" he asked, anxious to plunge at once into a subject of interest to both.

"Yes," she replied; "I was with her the whole



afternoon. This murder and accusation are terrible blows to her; they revive the past, and she reproaches herself as the cause of the crime, and its consequences. I have never seen a woman more miserable."

Ulic moved uneasily. "I called on Philip to-day, but he was not at home," he remarked.

"Nor have I seen him; but I fancy the arrest affects him much less than it does his wife. Those who stand helplessly by, looking on the stricken they love, suffer most."

"If their natures are sensitive," he added.

"In her nervous condition suspense will kill her."

Ulic started.

"Because in her remorse for the past," continued Gal Alex, "she exaggerates the danger threatening Philip, and by way of adding to her torture is secretly convinced he must suffer for this crime."

"Good heavens." The room with its semi-light became almost unendurable to Ulic; the speaker's white face, earnest eyes and serious voice impressed him painfully. "If you and I," he said, "who are merely his friends, believe him innocent, surely his wife must be convinced of it likewise."

"So she is implicitly; but she hasn't a suspicion of the murderer, which one of us has."

Ulic gazed at her in astonishment, and waited to let her proceed, but she did not seem inclined to continue.

"Then you know——" he said.

"Nothing, but I suspect much," she replied.

"But how did you become acquainted with the fact I held a clue to the murderer?"

She leaned forward eagerly; her eyes dilating with surprise searched his face, and with a voice tremulous from suppressed emotion, asked, "What is this you



"You know I suspect——" and he paused.

"No, indeed. I believed the surmises rested only with myself, and I dared not speak lest my words might bring him——"

"Jacob Glender."

"Yes, to his death. I have been torn by suspense when alone, and with remorse for my silence when I see Miriam suffer; and yet," she continued excitedly, "the man I believe to have murdered Colonel Tarbert is my husband; in the eyes of God and the world he is my husband, and I cannot denounce him. I know not how to act, but come what will the innocent must not suffer for the guilty. Since the news of the murder reached me I have not been able to think or sleep. After all I am but a helpless woman."

"But not friendless," said Ulic in a voice which touched her.

She stretched out her hand to him in response. "Thank heaven for that," she exclaimed. "And therefore I have sent for you, dear friend, that you may advise me."

"What you have mentioned of your suspicions fills me with surprise," said Ulic, "for I have reason to believe Jacob Glender the murderer; but until now no word of my thoughts has crossed my lips—because——"

He left his sentence unfinished, but she understood what he would say. The knowledge that he had been the means of handing over to justice and death the one man who obstructed his path to happiness, must not shadow his future. He felt certain the woman he loved would never accept the hand of him who gave her husband to the executioner. It was a terrible thought for Ulic. He had waited for her patiently, would wait to the end hopefully, but fate threatened to deprive him of the bliss he sought. He was resolved, no matter how he might suffer in the present and future, to speak and



save Philip if danger really threatened him. But just as might without his help find a clue to Glender some day, meanwhile he would remain silent. Presently his thoughts coming round to the words Gal Alex had spoken, he said, "You haven't told me how you came to think Jacob Glender had committed this murder."

"No. Two nights ago I sat in the study correcting proofs, the hour was late. Suddenly I heard a violent ring at the street door bell, and immediately after a servant told me a man wished to see me on urgent business. I at once knew who it was, and it flashed on me this visit must be the outcome of pressing necessity or he wouldn't forfeit my annuity by breaking the terms of our agreement. I also remembered I was in his power; one sentence from him to the servants and my secret was the world's property. Therefore I resolved to see him."

"You were brave."

"Prepared as I was for him, his appearance startled me. His face was deadly white; in his eyes lurked the expression of a wild beast at bay. At first I believed him drunk, but his collected manner quickly convinced me of my error, and I soon saw I had nothing to fear from him. He said he knew he had wronged me, that I had behaved better than he deserved. 'Do me but one more good turn,' he said, 'and I swear you shall never see me again. It may be I haven't long to live, but long or short, you will be troubled by me no more. I am going to leave this country; give me what money you can to-night.' I saw it was no time to hesitate; I suspected some dire event had happened in his life, I dared not think what. I told him I had but ten pounds with me. 'Give it me,' he said savagely. I unlocked a drawer and laid ten sovereigns on the desk. As he eagerly stretched forward his right hand to grasp them,



I saw it was smeared with blood. He noticed it at the same time and quickly pulled it back, then his eyes fixed themselves on mine, and for a second, that seemed an eternity, I felt my life stood in danger. He put forth his left hand and grasped the gold. 'No matter what you hear, keep silent,' he said. 'Speak of what you have seen to-night, and my blood be on your head,' and turning away with the air of one hunted by deadly fear, he left the house. I was filled with a sense of approaching terror. Next day when I heard of Colonel Tarbert's death I felt Jacob Glender was his murderer. I cannot tell you what torture I have since suffered; now praying for his arrest that the task of revealing my suspicions might be removed from me, and Philip's innocence be established; again asking forgiveness because my desires seemed guilty. Then comes my great dread, that if captured the whole story of his wretched life and mine will become subjects of vulgar curiosity and pitiless gossip to thousands. I am miserable—miserable," she cried out.

It tortured Ulic to see her suffer, and feel unable to relieve her. "What you tell me, strongly confirms my opinion as to Glender's guilt," he said, "of which you will remember neither of us has proof. Once when I called on the colonel, Glender came to his rooms, and I immediately recognized him as the same man who had obtained an interview with you whilst I remained in the garden. I then learned he was well known to Bob, and I had reason to believe they were concerned in a recent forgery; some difference probably arose between them, which ended in this murder. I should at once have mentioned my suspicions to the police, but——"

"But that he is my husband," she added bitterly.

"What is to be done?" Ulic asked.

"Ah, dear friend, that is a question I have asked myself again and again without being able to answer."



"A woman sees further than a man in trouble, doubt, or danger."

"But a man's common-sense judges best."

"Had we not better wait and see if, without your aid or mine, justice will not charge Glender with the murder?"

"And meanwhile leave suspicions to fasten on Philip, and suspense to kill his wife."

"But really we have no proof Jacob Glender is guilty of this deed."

"Yet in our hearts each is convinced he did, and because of our certainty we refuse to speak. No, look at it in what light we will, there remains but one thing for us to do."

"And that?"

"Our duty. It must be done, though," she added sadly; "it forfeits our chance of happiness. Mention your suspicions to the police, saying no word of what I have told you."

"I cannot do this, because I feel you would never wed the man who denounced your husband to the law."

"We must think only of our duty," she replied after a pause. "I feel every hour of silence increases our guilt. With one word you might bring hope to a suspected man, peace to a suffering woman."

"I cannot. Not till Philip stands in actual danger shall I speak."

"It may then be too late to save him. Glender may have escaped, and all evidence of his guilt have disappeared. Good heavens, what do I say?"

"But fate may bring him to his deserts without our aid."

She thought a moment, and then said quickly and with relief, "Let us consult Benoni; he will keep our secret and advise us how to act."



"I had not thought of him before," replied Ulic, grasping at this outlet from his present difficulty. "I shall seek and bring him here, to-night, if it be not too late."

"Come with him at any hour. I shall await him impatiently."

Ulic rose, full of a new determination, but before he crossed the room a servant opened the door and announced the mystic. Gal Alex eagerly went forward to welcome his arrival at this most opportune moment. Calm, dignified and grave, he crossed his hands upon his breast and bowed in salutation.

"I am more glad than usual to see you," she said, when he had seated himself near her. "Indeed, Mr. Tarbert was about to seek you."

"Yes," he replied, as if already aware of the fact.

"For we have that to tell you which perplexes us greatly, and we know not how to act. You will advise us?"

"You would speak to me," answered Benoni, "of the man known as Jacob Glender?"

His hearers started.

"Yes," she replied, fixing her eyes upon him.

"You need take no further trouble concerning him."

"He has been arrested?"

"He is dead."

"Dead," they echoed, and the same question flashed on both—would his death prevent his crime being proved? Then came a second thought, Gal Alex was free. This idea for a moment bereft them of all feeling but that of happy relief. Presently Ulic asked, "Is it known——?"

"That he strangled Colonel Tarbert? Yes. This morning information of his being the murderer was given to the police; by the afternoon they had traced



him to Wimbledon Common. Having reason to believe he would visit the scene of his crime they lay in ambush waiting for him. Towards evening he arrived at the spot, they rushed forward to arrest him; he fled, they pursued; as they approached him he drew out a revolver and shot himself through the chest. The wound did not prove immediately fatal. He lived one hour, and in his last moments confessed he had murdered Colonel Tarbert. His dying deposition has been taken."

"He is dead," said Ulic, wishing to assure himself of news that would alter his whole life.

"He is dead," repeated Benoni solemnly. "Having sought Philip and assured him suspicion was no longer directed towards him, I came here, that my words might bring relief and gladness to your hearts."

"Always a faithful friend," said Gal Alex gratefully.

A weight which had burdened her years had suddenly fallen from her. The man who had blighted her young life, filled her with sorrow, made her acquainted with shame, was dead. From him she could suffer no further wrong. In her darkest moment the crown of her happiness had come. She was free to wed the man who loved her—whom she loved beyond all men, above all things. The tragedy of her existence had ended. A sense of peace and thankfulness filled her breast.

"You know," said Benoni to her, "I would serve you."

"I remember you once told me so, and added if I were in doubt or danger I was to send for you. I was about to obey when you entered. Likewise do I recall your words, which I have often read with doubt and despair: 'The day shall be when love will reign in your heart as a moon in heaven calming a troubled sea.'"



"It is even now at hand," said the mystic. "My children, may happiness crown your lives, may peace for ever dwell in your souls."

And rising up he departed from them.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### FAREWELL.

WITH sudden relief from suspense, Miriam's strength gave way, and a violent fever prostrated her for weeks. Little hope for her recovery was entertained by those surrounding her, but eventually she rallied and returned from the gates of death. Her progress towards complete health was slow. Summer came and went, and she still remained a wreck of her former self. All through winter she was unable to leave the house.

When spring returned, she said her strength would certainly be restored, and she cheerfully dwelt on the drives she would take, the dresses she would wear, the few remaining friends she would visit. It must surely be a pleasant time; the beginning of a new existence. But, meanwhile, all through the dark and dreary months of winter, she sat hour after hour all day in a great arm-chair drawn close by the fire. Here Philip, sitting at her feet, her hand upon his head or shoulder, read to her untiringly, spoke to her with feigned cheerfulness, painted all that would be in their future lives. Here she had received the doctor's visits, dreamt dark dreams of the past, thought much of the future, when hope and fear like angels of light and darkness attended her by turns. Those who watched her pale, pinched face and lustrous eyes did not doubt her days were numbered. She had been summoned hence, and with



lingering footsteps and reluctant will obeyed a mandate none dared slight.

Spring, joyous and newborn, triumphing over bleakness and death, came, and found her unwilling to leave her bed; she rested better there she explained, and was warmer. She must postpone her drives until summer, a few weeks longer at most. Never complaining, though occasionally racked with pain, she obeyed the doctor's orders in all things, mechanically, silently, hopelessly, for it gradually dawned upon her she was dying—slowly dying. And through the dark cypress foliage of fears, she looked on the pale kingdom of death.

Throughout the slow days and weary nights, when the dread shadow seemed never absent from her side, what visions of the past and thoughts of the future rose in her mind. All things appeared to her in a clearer and newer light than she had beheld them before. It seemed but yesterday she had enjoyed the simple pleasures of her girlhood; the faces of school friends, long forgotten until now, rose in her memory, sometimes their voices rang in her ears. Then came the days in which she had first met Philip, felt awed at his grave manner, interested in his life, questioned her heart regarding him. She thought she had loved him then, but judging from the present standard of her affection knew now her feelings were but the outcome of fancy. How happy had she been during the first brief months of their married life, before a change came and parted them. Recollections followed of the feverish hour of temptation and flight, succeeded by awakening and remorse, parting from him she came to loathe, reconciliation to him she had wronged.

If she had a chance of beginning life over again, how differently would she act. Nay, if she might only start from the present standpoint in her journey, how hard she would strive to become worthy of Philip, to make



atonement for her desertion by her affection ; but fate had decreed this must not be. Surely her sin had been speedily punished ; she could but bow her head and submit.

She had never understood her husband, never appreciated his love, or fathomed his feelings until now—when they were about to part. That her perceptions came too late filled her with pain. Here again was the bitter mockery of fate laughing discordantly through every phase of life. Had she felt towards him in the past as she did in the present, what sorrow, shame, and remorse had been spared her. Why had the light revealing him clearly to her eyes come so tardily ?

During these days of pain, when her spirit gradually released itself from her body, her husband's presence formed her fullest happiness. She counted the moments of his absence, listened for sounds of his footsteps, and welcomed him with brightening eyes. But oftentimes whilst he was beside her came the cruel thought that in a little while she, having passed from his life would be forgotten. One day not far distant, but alas terribly near, she would be taken away and laid amongst a pale silent company, and he would return without her to the home which should know her no more. Whilst all things went on as before for him, she, a loathsome object hidden away from the shrinking sight of men, would slowly crumble into dust. For weeks and months after her departure he would doubtless feel a void in his life, but time healing this would rob her of his love ; and through coming years, though he might remember her now and then, her absence would cause him no bitter pang. The spring of next year would look—it may be—as bright to his eyes as this, though she should not be with him.



Brooding over these thoughts, she was filled with misery; not that she blamed him, only she rebelled against forgetfulness of the absent, a law of nature the living hold merciful. No life, she knew, could bear long continuance of passionate grief; the memory of the brightest, most loving, the noblest and best, gradually fades from the recollections of those whose hearts have been well-nigh broken during dark days and bitter hours immediately following final separation. The widowed wife who believes the world can never be the same to her, with the passage of time feels fresh interests spring into existence; the bereaved widower seeks consolation in a new affection; the orphan forms ties closer than those which bound him to father or mother. It is always the same. Let the footprints be ever so deeply marked in the sands of life, presently a wave of time sweeps in and they are not. Were the dead to return, what changes would they find; old places filled, strangers more cherished than they, the past forgotten in the present. Better, far better they never come back. O, darkness and desolation; O, misery and pain, but this is cruel.

Now, whilst her heart beat and blood still ran in her veins, her nature rose rebelliously against this fate, and she would have risked her future chance of happiness could she but insure Philip's lasting recollection of herself; but experience of humanity assured her this might not be.

Hours there were, when the world being bright with sunshine and the sky unfretted by cloud, faint hopes of recovery mocked the darkness of her fears. Still in the morning of life, she shrank from the night of death. To descend day by day, inch by inch into the grave, whilst the world was fair and glad, filled her with horror and self-compassion. She had sorrowed deep for her sin; perhaps mercy would be shown her



in the eleventh hour. She was yet young; the future promised much happiness; her death would cause Philip pain; maybe for these reasons a few more years would be meted out to her.

Such thoughts fretted her one day early in May. She had been more than usually sleepless the previous night, and nervously restless through the morning hours. Philip, watching beside her, happily unconscious of the struggle tearing at her heart-strings, saw her lids closed, and in a little while, believing she slept, softly rose to depart. She instantly opened her eyes, filled with tears, and he sat down by her again in silence.

"The day looks bright and warm," she said feebly, "but I am cold, aye, cold as the grave in which I shall soon be laid. I feel as if I were already turning to clay."

He could not answer her, dared not look at her; but taking one of her pale thin hands, clasped it to his breast as if he would impart his vitality to her. They could hear the pulse of life beating in the High Street close by; the ceaseless roll of traffic, cries of flower vendors and newsboys, loud voices of passing crowds. The whole world seemed glad. Sunshine came in broad beams through the windows of this room of death, falling on the carpet and touching the bed, as if it would mercifully brighten the home of one who could enjoy its pleasant light no more.

"It is now spring," she said, "my favourite season, when earth is born again, and yet I must die."

"My darling," he replied, struggling hard to steady his voice, "there is still hope. Now that sunshine and warm days have returned you may grow stronger, and in the autumn we shall go abroad, away from a cold English winter, and remain there until you are well."

She looked at him questioningly, wondering if he said



this merely to cheer her, or if he really deceived himself.

"The sunshine," she said sadly, "like all good things, has come too late for me."

He only pressed her hand. No pain he had ever endured equalled that he now experienced. Instantly she felt the suffering her words had caused.

"Forgive me, Philip," she pleaded. "I am selfish and cruel to say this to you; but oh, my love, it is terribly hard to part from you; the thought tears out my heart."

She stretched her worn hands to him, and he, sitting by her pillow, took her in his arms. She nestled her head upon his breast. After some moments' silence, during which heaven only knows what dark and troubled thoughts flitted across her mind, she spoke again in so a low tone he could scarce catch her words.

"It is best," she said, her poor pale lips trembling, a world of despairing sadness in her tones; "it is best after all I should die. I have told myself this so often, I have almost come to believe it now. My life went wrong, some evil fate crossed it, but it may be righted elsewhere, God knows."

"Dear heart," he said gravely, "even if we are parted, think how little you lose, how valueless is life. You place your hopes of happiness in it now because its speedy termination seems possible; but if a long range of years were guaranteed you, how little would you esteem their possession. Are we not as children who cry bitterly when toys are taken from them, which, left in their hands, would speedily be broken and cast heedlessly away? What pleasures or profits worth having does existence hold for any of us; affections which weary with time, honours that bring no balm to craving hearts, friends who disappoint,



expectations that prove fruitless, realizations that deceive. These are the garlands crowning life's bitter struggle. What are we but phantoms, melting into shadows at night, from which we merged at morn, leaving no trace behind. Could you and I change places, I would gladly welcome the peace of death."

His words brought her little consolation.

"I am not a philosopher who reasons," she answered, "but a woman who loves, and—and—we must part." Her heart overflowed with feelings she was powerless to express. Would he in the future know the depth and strength of her affection; would he ever realize how fully he absorbed her life? If she could but make him understand.

"Oh, Philip," she broke out with a vigour and earnestness that surprised him, "I could die happy if I thought you would remember me always, never forget me."

"My darling," he answered, striving to be calm, "you will be with me ever. Even if death robs me of you, I know the grave cannot imprison a soul. Dropping the body as a cast-garment, the spirit enjoys a freedom never known before. You will be with me always. Do you believe this?" he asked.

"Being with you," she answered slowly, "would be heaven to me."

"Then we shall know no separation."

She looked at him with a world of love and gratitude, as if she would impress herself for ever on his mind. Neither spoke. So great a love could not bear the poor expression of words; they understood each other in all. But even as their eyes met, hers changed, a frightened, fixed stare rested in them. Her foot was on the threshold of the portal all must pass; the vision of a world, concerning which none who has seen may speak flashed upon her sight. She muttered some words he could



not catch. Startled and fearful, he placed his ear near her lips, only to hear what filled him with new dread. Pressing his arms closely round her, as if he would imprison life, he called aloud for help, but before the sound of his voice had ceased she lay dead upon his breast.

For her time had ceased, eternity had begun.

He laid her back upon the pillows, reverently knelt beside her, and burying his head, gave vent to suppressed feelings. And as the deep is roused by storms, so was his heart rent by grief. How long he remained here he never knew. As in a dream, he was conscious the door opened and Benoni entered. The mystic advanced and placed one hand upon Philip's shoulder, but he neither moved nor spoke.

"My friend," said Benoni, "with this fair life your sorrows end. Your trials have been great, but your victory is incomplete. The human element in your nature overcame the spiritual, and in this incarnation you can never possess the powers you desired to enjoy."

Still Philip remained silent and motionless.

"But," continued Benoni, "as justice is the first principle of all divine laws, the gifts you have merited will be given you freely. Length of days, the affection of many friends, fame that will echo through the new world and the old, such wealth as you desire shall be yours. The inner sight you possess will be increased fourfold, so that it will pierce all outward seeming, read men's minds as an open page, scan the future relating to your ways. Peace will dwell in your heart. It may be whilst in the flesh you and I will never meet again; but when counsel is necessary mine shall be yours; and in the silent hours of dusk and grey of dawn, when the world without is hushed and your heart seeks rest, I shall be with you visible to sight. Dear friend, farewell."



Philip, still kneeling with bowed head by the bed of death, listened dreamily to the mystic's words. When they had ceased he said, "Give me back this life I have lost, the one object on earth I love, and withhold the boons you promise."

No reply fell on his ears. When he rose up he was alone with the dead.

**THE END.**



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**Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription** is the outgrowth, or result, of this great and valuable experience. Thousands of testimonials received from patients and from physicians who have tested it in the more aggravated and obstinate cases which had baffled their skill, prove it to be the most wonderful remedy ever devised for the relief and cure of suffering women. It is not recommended as a "cure-all," but as a most perfect Specific for woman's peculiar ailments.

**As a powerful, invigorating tonic** it imparts strength to the whole system, and to the uterus, or womb and its appendages, in particular. For overworked, "worn-out," "run-down," debilitated teachers, milliners, dressmakers, seamstresses, "shop-girls," housekeepers, nursing mothers, and feeble women generally, Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription is the greatest earthly boon, being unequalled as an appetizing cordial and restorative tonic. It promotes digestion and assimilation of food, cures nausea, weakness of stomach, indigestion, bloating and eructations of gas.

**As a soothing and strengthening nervine**, "Favorite Prescription" is unequalled and is invaluable in allaying and subduing nervous excitability, irritability, exhaustion, prostration, hysteria, spasms and other distressing, nervous symptoms commonly attendant upon functional and organic disease of the womb. It induces refreshing sleep and relieves mental anxiety and despondency.

**Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription** is a legitimate medicine, carefully compounded by an experienced and skillful physician, and adapted to woman's delicate organization. It is purely vegetable in its composition and

perfectly harmless in its effects in any condition of the system.

**"Favorite Prescription" is a positive cure** for the most complicated and obstinate cases of leucorrhea, or "whites," excessive flowing at monthly periods, painful menstruation, unnatural suppressions, prolapsus or falling of the womb, weak back, "female weakness," anteversion, retroversion, bearing-down sensations, chronic congestion, inflammation and ulceration of the womb, inflammation, pain and tenderness in ovaries, accompanied with internal heat.

**In pregnancy**, "Favorite Prescription" is a "mother's cordial," relieving nausea, weakness of stomach and other distressing symptoms common to that condition. If its use is kept up in the latter months of gestation, it so prepares the system for delivery as to greatly lessen, and many times almost entirely do away with the sufferings of that trying ordeal.

**"Favorite Prescription,"** when taken in connection with the use of Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery, and small laxative doses of Dr. Pierce's Purgative Pellets (Little Liver Pills), cures Liver, Kidney and Bladder diseases. Their combined use also removes blood taints, and abolishes cancerous and scrofulous humors from the system.

**Treating the Wrong Disease.**—Many times women call on their family physicians, suffering, as they imagine, one from dyspepsia, another from heart disease, another from liver or kidney disease, another from nervous exhaustion or prostration, another with pain here or there, and in this way they all present alike to themselves and their easy-going and indifferent, or over-busy doctor, separate and distinct diseases, for which he prescribes his pills and potions, assuming them to be such, when, in reality, they are all only *symptoms* caused by some womb disorder. The physician, ignorant of the cause of suffering, encourages his practice until large bills are made. The suffering patient gets no better, but probably worse by reason of the delay, wrong treatment and consequent complications. A proper medicine, like Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription, *directed to the cause* would have entirely removed the disease, thereby dispelling all those distressing symptoms, and instituting comfort instead of prolonged misery.

**"Favorite Prescription" is the only medicine for women sold, by druggists, under a positive guarantee**, from the manufacturers, that it will give satisfaction in every case, or money will be refunded. This guarantee has been printed on the bottle-wrapper, and faithfully carried out for many years. **Large bottles (100 doses) \$1.00, or six bottles for \$5.00.**

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